

Volume One

A Qualitative Exploration of Pupil, Parent and Staff Discourses of Extended School Non-Attendance

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Abstract

Extended school non-attendance (ESNA) is presented in the literature as a difficulty that can result in negative outcomes for the pupil, not only with regard to academic attainment but mental health difficulties, relationship problems and reduced future prospects. In the political context of increased legislation regarding the requirements for pupils to be in receipt of suitable educational provision, a legal discourse of ESNA has become entrenched. This sits alongside a dominant clinical discourse that positions school non-attendance as a within child, medicalised construct.

Whilst early research aligned extended non-attendance with anxiety, subsequent findings have constructed such attendance difficulties as multi-factorial, interactive and individual. In the existing research, there is little that includes the pupil voice to examine their construction of the attendance difficulty.

This qualitative exploration therefore, aimed to examine the construction of the reasons for ESNA by the pupils, parents and school staff, through examining the discourses of participants. The findings of the analysis highlighted the heterogeneity of ESNA and are illustrative of the disparate constructions of the participant groups. The results are discussed in the context of the current literature and the implications of the findings are considered in terms of strategic prevention, identification and intervention of attendance difficulties, with particular attention to the role of educational psychologists.

Dedication

For Georgia, Jack and Giles

Always believe in yourself and believe in your 'truth'.

-X-

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I promise that this is the last one.

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List of Acronyms

BERA	British Education Research Association
BPS	British Psychological Society
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
DFE	Department for Education
DFEE	Department for Education and Employment
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
ESNA	Extended School Non-Attendance
HM GOV	Her Majesty's Government
LA	Local Authority
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

1.1 Introduction

This volume constitutes part one of a two volume thesis, submitted in accordance with the academic and research requirements of the Applied Educational and Child Psychology Doctorate at the University of Birmingham. The purpose of this chapter is to frame the study in relation to the background and rationale of the research and to then position this qualitative exploration within the context of the literature concerned with extended school non-attendance (ESNA). The philosophical orientation of the research will be outlined, before detailing the structure of volume one.

1.2 Contextual Information

The research was conducted during the supervised professional practice placement at a West Midlands Educational Psychology Service (EPS), undertaken as a trainee educational psychologist. During the first year of this placement, a group of young people with attendance difficulties who had been out of school for an extended period of time were raised as a concern. This group of pupils had become known as ‘anxious non-attenders’ by professionals within the EPS and in the wider infrastructure of the education system, including school staff and personal in the local authority (LA). The research was conducted at a time when ESNA was gaining prevalence on the political and educational agenda of the LA and a greater understanding of this phenomena was being sought to inform decisions about educational provision for this group of pupils.

1.3 School Attendance

Attending school is constructed as crucial for developing not only children's academic ability but also their skills, values, cultural knowledge and sense of citizenship (Pelligrini, 2007). Equally, it is recognised that most children will occasionally not attend school during their education (Thambirajah, Grandison and De Hayes, 2008); for a proportion of the school age population however, this absence becomes extended (Lauchlan, 2003).

Whilst absenteeism may be constructed as excusable or inexcusable (Kearney, 2008), this construction is simplistic in light of the myriad of terms affiliated with school non-attendance, including truancy, psychoneurotic truancy, school phobia, school refusal, school refusal behaviour and school withdrawal (Heyne, 2006). This simplicity therefore, obscures the complexities that are evident in the construction of the phenomena of school absenteeism.

1.3.1 Prevalence of ESNA

In the United Kingdom, schools are legally required to record sessional attendance information twice daily and to code the reason for any absence (DFE, 2016). Whilst such data achieves a record of the total absences for each pupil, it fails to indicate the pattern of the non-attendance and thus it is not possible to identify absence that is prolonged over a period of time. As such, the systems of recording absence create obscurity in understanding the prevalence of attendance difficulties, which is further complicated by the 'type' of non-attendance to which the statistics refer and the criteria used to establish this (Elliot, 1999).

In relation to school refusal behaviour, a term used to encompass all forms of non-attendance, Kearney (2001) claims that this may affect between 5% and 28% of young

people at some point in their school career. In referring to school refusal, as distinct from truancy however, a figure of approximately 2% or less is consistently cited (King et al, 1995; Elliot, 1999, Egger, Costello and Angold, 2003; Emmerson et al 2004; Gregory and Purcell, 2014), whilst Pelligrini (2007) extends this to up to 5%.

Furthermore, the variations between local authorities in the monitoring and reporting of ESNA contributes to difficulties in gathering accurate information regarding prevalence (Baker and Bishop, 2015) and results in an over-reliance on schools and parents in classifying the attendance without addressing any underlying difficulties (Birioukov, 2016). Indeed, Reid (2008) claims that the classification of authorised and unauthorised attendance is ‘...at best, unhelpful [and] to an extent the existing classification system tends to mask the scale of the problem,’ (p. 346). This is attributed to the way in which schools apply the authorised/unauthorised dichotomy (Atkinson et al, 2003) and the pressure on schools to maintain and publish attendance figures (Malcolm et al, 2003).

The criteria applied to define ESNA and classify attendance therefore, in relation to the statistics, is disparate and the period of absence is not specified. As such, the number of pupils who become extended school non-attenders is unclear.

1.3.2 The Demographic of Pupils Experiencing ESNA

The statistical data gathered by local authorities for patterns of absence in the pupil population are elicited based upon a number of pupil characteristics (DFE, 2018: Appendix 1). In consideration of the demographic of pupils who experience ESNA however, the research presents a contradictory profile. Whilst it is stated that attendance difficulties affect boys and girls in equal measure (Freemont, 2003; Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Heyes, 2008; Goodman and Scott, 2012), it is equally

claimed that whether truancy affects one group more than the other is dependent on age (Malcolm et al, 2003). Furthermore, Reid (1999) states that dysfunctional families and low economic status are strong determinants of pupil non-attendance, whilst other research suggests that socio-economic factors do not impact on attendance difficulties (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Heyes, 2008; Goodman and Scott, 2012). It is interesting to note, that in regards to age group, the peak times in relation to ESNA are at transition points in educational settings (Pellegrini, 2007; Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Heyes, 2008; Goodman and Scott, 2012; Nutall and Woods, 2013). This is not consistent however, with the overall pattern of absence, which suggest that ages 7-9 and 15-16 years are the optimum points of non-attendance.

There is little information regarding ESNA and ethnic minority groups. In the United States, Lyon and Cotler (2007) report a growing divide between white and ethnic minority students regarding 'problematic attendance,' despite the prevalence of poor attendance records for children from diverse backgrounds. The researchers attribute this to the reliance on clinical samples that are comprised of predominantly ethnically white participants as ethnic minority groups are less likely to access and remain in clinical services (Rawal et al, 1999). Furthermore, Lyon and Cotler (2007) state that ethnicity and socio economic status should be considered in relation to the 'truancy'/'school refusal' distinction, '...because families who do not seek or prematurely discontinue treatment in a mental health setting may be less likely to have their problematic non-attendance conceptualized as school refusal,' (p.556), thus resulting in them being more likely to receive punitive sanctions. This therefore, presents a skewed statistical profile in which socio-economic class and ethnicity are marginalised.

1. 4 Rational for the Research

1.4.1 The Effects of ESNA

Whilst ESNA affects a relatively small proportion of the population, through non-attendance the pupil misses not only educational opportunities but also the developmental experiences offered by school (Freemont, 2003). Extended non-attendance has been aligned with negative short and long term consequences for the young person, their family and the wider community (Pelligrini, 2007). Such a pattern of behaviour is thus constructed as, '...a serious mental and physical health concern,' (Kearney, 2001, p. 452).

Research shows that pupils with prolonged absence accrue poor academic attainment. They are also at greater risk of developing a psychiatric disorder that may continue into adulthood, have difficulties with peer relationships, and may experience reduced future prospects, including employment difficulties (McShane, Walter and Rey, 2001; Freemont, 2003; Lyon and Cotler, 2007; Gregory and Purcell, 2014). Some of the potential effects are recognised in government policy, which also constructs non-attendance at school as a safeguarding risk:

'Children missing education are at significant risk of underachieving, being victims of harm, exploitation or radicalisation, and becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training) later in life.'

(DFE, 2016, p. 5)

Furthermore, it is reported that a pupil's non-attendance can negatively affect their immediate family (Freemont, 2003; Lyon and Cotler 2007; Reid 2008) and indeed the wider community, due to the association of non-attendance and anti-social behaviour (Lyon and Cotler, 2007).

1.4.2 The Heterogeneous Nature of ESNA

Historically, anxiety has been aligned with attendance difficulties, and this will be discussed further in Chapter 2. It is recognised however, that ESNA is not a unitary concept due to the heterogeneous nature of the reasons for the presenting difficulty (Miller, 2008). Indeed, government guidance regarding attendance makes reference to multi-causal reasons for non-attendance resulting in a highly heterogeneous population (DFE, 2016). Furthermore, the reasons for the non-attendance, become more disparate as the period of absence extends:

‘Children who fail to attend school are not a uniform group and SNA [school non-attendance], especially when prolonged and persistent, remains a puzzling and complex problem.’

(Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008, p. 11)

As such, it was deemed reasonable to question whether the labelling of this group as anxious non-attenders, was consistent with the constructs of the young people experiencing ESNA within the local authority.

1.4.3 The Pupil Voice of ESNA

There is limited research into ESNA that has endeavoured to include the child’s voice, and it has focused on truancy as distinct from school refusal (for example, Malcolm et al, 2003) or the experience of extended school non-attendance (for example, Gregory and Purcell, 2014; Baker and Bishop, 2015). Reid (2008) however, considers Kelly (1955) who reasonably proposed that, to understand a problem, it was most appropriate to ask those whom it concerned. In the case of ESNA, this includes those who are acting out the non-attending behaviour (the pupil) in addition to others involved

in the systems around the child who experience the phenomena vicariously (parents and professionals).

1.4.4 The Role of Professionals and ESNA

In consideration of the effects of attendance difficulties, ESNA should be of interest to professionals working with children and young people. Educational psychologists (EP) should have a central role in this, such that supporting the inclusion of all children in education is an integral part of their work (Gregory and Purcell, 2014, p. 38). Consequently, this area of research is directly relevant to EP practice.

This study therefore, offers a qualitative exploration of the construct of extended school non-attendance, as constructed by those most involved i.e. the pupil, their parent and school staff.

1.5 Philosophical Orientation of the Research

This research questions the ‘truth’ that anxiety is the reason that pupils in the local authority become extended non-attenders. As such, the exploration of ESNA is positioned within a relativist ontology that rejects the positivist premise of a discoverable truth but rather assumes that there are concurrent multiple realities that are socially constructed (Gergen, 2015). Social constructionism therefore challenges what is assumed to be ‘truths’ through, ‘...understanding the generation, transformation and suppression of what we take to be objective knowledge,’ (Gergen, 2001, p. 25).

1.5.1 The Constructive Role of Discourse

From a social constructionist epistemological position, knowledge is actively constructed through discourse, such that 'social meanings are ascribed within language and therefore language is productive as well as reflective of meaning,' (Burman, 2008, p. 230). The theory of discourse therefore, positions language as constructive in the forming of knowledge rather than merely an expression of such (Potter and Wetherall; 1987; Wetherall, Taylor and Yates, 2001; Burman, 2008; Burr, 2015; Gergen, 2015), such that, '[Discourse] builds objects, worlds and minds and social relations,' (Wetherall, Taylor and Yates, 2001, p.16).

As these objects, worlds, minds and social relations of the human world are affirmed through the sharing of prevailing discourses, they become dominant social realities that are perceived as 'definitive truths', whilst alternative versions of reality are marginalised (Wetherall, Taylor and Yates, 2001; Gergen, 2015). The construction of school attendance in government policy and the medical paradigm has led to two dominant discourses in the field; a clinical and a legal discourse (Pelligrini, 2007), which serve exploratory and regulatory functions respectively.

In accordance with this epistemological position, discourse analysis was considered an appropriate method of analysis to explore the constructs of the participant groups and a discourse analysis was performed on the data.

1.6 Structure of Volume One

Following this introduction, volume one consists of a further five chapters. Chapter 2 provides a critical exploration of the literature of school non-attendance in order to position the research in the relevant field. The dominant legal and medical discourses

of ENSA are explored and the prevalent reasons for attendance difficulties are discussed within the historical context of 'school refusal'. The nomenclatorial difficulty brought by the inconsistent use of terminology is reflected upon and alternative models of ESNA are considered before briefly examining the current interventions favoured to resolve attendance difficulties.

The philosophical orientation of the research is detailed in Chapter 3, in order to establish how this is aligned with the chosen method of data analysis, in addition to outlining the procedural steps of the study and considering the ethical implications of working with a vulnerable group.

In Chapters 4 and 5, the resulting constructs of the discourse analysis are discussed in order to explore how the three groups of participants construct the reasons for ESNA, whether there is a differential in the constructions of these groups and, in light of this, to consider if the term 'anxious non-attenders' is concurrent with the discourses of the participant groups.

Finally, in Chapter 6 the implications of the research for EP practice and for local authority policy and provision for pupils experiencing ESNA are considered and evaluated in relation to the strengths and limitations of this research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will examine the increased prominence of school attendance in Government policy before exploring the construction of school non-attendance and the dominant discourses. The limitations of these constructions and the consequential marginalisation of alternative discourses will be considered in terms of the implications for young people, their families and the education system.

2.2 A Focus on Attendance: Legislation and Policy

Since the Act of Parliament that first made education compulsory in 1880, a discourse of school non-attendance has developed in government policy, through the increasing focus in legislation on educational provision. Subsequent Acts of Parliament have served to extend the period for which education is a legal obligation through the progressive raising of the school leaving age, illustrated in The Timeline of Legislation (Table 1).

For a number of years, cross party policy and legislation, has positioned school attendance as a key component in the government strategy to raise educational standards. The legislative focus on attendance therefore, has resulted in a prevailing political discourse that aligns academic achievement with school attendance. Indeed, the Government document, 'Guidance for School Attendance' (DFE, 2016), explicitly constructs academic success for individuals and improving standards in education as synonymous with school attendance:

‘Central to raising standards in education and ensuring all pupils can fulfil their potential is an assumption so widely understood that it is insufficiently stated – pupils need to attend school regularly to benefit from their education,’

(DFE, 2016, p.54)

Year	Legislation	Implications for School Attendance
1870	Education Act	The first legislation to specifically attend to provision of education in Britain responsible for the creation of school boards that established schools in areas of need, alongside existing voluntary schools.
1870	Foster's Education Act	Made education compulsory between the ages of 5 and 10.
1876	Royal Commission on the Factory Act	Recommended compulsory education to stop child labour.
1881	Elementary Act	Elementary education became free.
1893	Elementary Act (Blind and Deaf)	Extended education to blind and deaf children.
1893	Elementary Act (School Attendance) Amendment Bill	Made education compulsory up to 11.
1918	Fishers Education Act	School leaving age was raised to 14.
1944	Butler Education Act	Secondary school education was made free. The school leaving age raised to 15 to take effect in 1947 (the bill was previously considered in 1939 but postponed due to the second world war).
1973	-----	School leaving age raised to 16 following preparations that started in 1964.
2008	Education and Skills Act	By 2013 all 17 year olds and by 2015 all 18 year olds would be participating in some form of education or training.

Table 1: Timeline of Legislation Relating to School Attendance

The political discourse around school attendance is further evident in the framework that is used to evaluate a school's effectiveness, as judged by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED). As an element of the Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare judgement, attendance and punctuality is evaluated based on three criteria (Table 2):

Attendance Criteria	
Criteria 1	Overall absence and persistent absence rates for all pupils, and for different groups in relation to national figures for all pupils
Criteria 2	The extent to which low attenders are improving their attendance over time and whether attendance is consistently low (in the lowest 10%)
Criteria 3	Punctuality at arriving at school and at lessons

Table 2: Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare judgement – Attendance Criteria
(OFSTED, 2018, p. 55)

The judgement made is informed by the Persistent Absence Measure, which was first introduced by the Department for Education in 2005. Initially set at 20% of the overall possible attendance for a pupil in an academic year, the successive reductions in the threshold, to 15% (2011) and subsequently to 10% (2015) further reflects the trend to construct attendance as an outcome in education. It should be noted that 'Persistent Absence' in the context of education in England, is specifically used to denote this government measure and should not be confused with other terms that are used to refer to non-attendance (Baker and Bishop, 2015).

Political discourses also construct school absence in accordance with other social issues, for example attendance at school is regarded as, '...an important factor in reducing wider problems associated with social exclusion', (DFEE, 1998: 2). Other social problems include an increased risk of criminal and anti-social behaviour, in

addition to the subsequent impact on society of educational disadvantage and the reduced life prospects of its citizens.

In light of this, the 1997 White Paper (*Excellence in Schools*) focused on unauthorised absence (DFEE, 1997) and in 1998 the Government published the statistical bulletin *Pupil Absence and Truancy from Schools in England*, in the political context of the government target to reduce absenteeism by one third in the subsequent 4 years. Such a focus resulted in a multi-million pound investment in initiatives to tackle the issue of non-attendance. Indeed, in 2005 more money was allocated to combatting truancy and other forms of non-attendance than at any other time in the 50 years prior to this; it is notable however that no significant impact in terms of reducing non-attendance was found as a result of this (Reid, 2008).

The political concern with statistics has continued, and since the inaugural National Pupil Absence Table of 1994 (DFE, 1998), national statistics have continued to be collected and published regarding school absence rates; methodological changes however, necessitate caution in making annual comparisons.

2.3 Legal Discourses of School Non-Attendance

The legislation concerning children's education for a specified time each year and for a determined number of years positions school attendance as a legal requirement. The local authority is legally charged with identifying those pupils who are not in receipt of a suitable education by establishing '...the identities of children in their area who are of compulsory school age but are not registered pupils at a school, and are not receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school' (DFE, 2006, p.3). The aligned legal discourse has constructed parents as being responsible for their child receiving

a suitable education, be that in a school establishment or through home education. This is consistent with the Education Act (DFEE, 1996), which stipulates that it is the ‘Duty of parents to secure education of children of compulsory school age,’ (p.4), the details of which are shown in Section 7 of the Act (Table 3):

<i>Compulsory Education</i>
<p>7. The Parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable –</p> <p>(a) to his age, ability and aptitude, and</p> <p>(b) to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise</p>

Table 3: Section 7 of the Education Act (DFEE, 1996)

2.3.1: Enforcing School Attendance

Legal discourses of school non-attendance perform a regulatory function in society through the legal orders and penalties faced by parents should they fail to comply with the requirement for their child to be in receipt of suitable education (Sheppard, 2011). The specifics of these legal orders vary in the United Kingdom (U.K.) and, whilst all countries of the U.K. employ legal redress for parents whose children do not have educational provision, in England the legal actions range from directed parenting classes to prosecution (Table 4).

The DFE have collected statistics recording the prevalence of the legal action taken in each academic year since 2004, using the Parental Responsibility Measures. In relation to penalty notices issued to address school attendance, a marginal decline is shown in the most recently published figures; this however bucks the trend of preceding years, which has seen a significant annual increase in the use of this legal sanction (Figure 1). This is indicative of the construction of non-attendance as a legal

issue that serves to enforce school attendance in the context of current government legislation.

Legal Action to Enforce School Attendance	
Parenting Order	The parent is directed to attend parenting classes and to follow the courts instructions to improve the child's school attendance.
Education Supervision Order	The parent is appointed a supervisor to support their child's attendance at school. An application for an education supervision order will be made to the court if council considers a parent to require to support to ensure their child's attendance and that they are not cooperating with support that has been put in place.
School Attendance Order	Issued if the local council thinks the child is not getting an education. Parents are required to provide evidence that they have registered the child with a school specified in the order or that they are providing home education.
Penalty Notice	The local council can impose a fine of £60, which rises to £120 if not paid within 21 days; if the fine remains unpaid, this can result in prosecution of the parent.
Prosecution	Parents can be given a fine of up to £2,500, a community order or a jail sentence up to 3 months. The court will also enforce a Parenting Order.

Table 4: Legal Action Available in England to Enforce School Attendance (HM Government, 2018)



Fig. 1: Use of Penalty Notices to Address Poor Attendance (DFE, 2018)

2.4 Alternative Discourses of Non-School Attendance

In the U.K. therefore, the legal discourse of school non-attendance has become entrenched through legislation to determine that children receive a suitable education and that parents receive punitive consequences if this is not ensured. A dominant medical discourse however, has developed from practice that has sought to differentiate 'types' of non-attendance.

Historically, the term truancy was widely used to describe all unauthorised absence and viewed as synonymous with delinquency (Malcolm, Thorpe and Lowden, 1996). There is however, an inherent difficulty in employing this terminology in a generic fashion due to the different meanings that can be attributed to it. As such, in constructing the phenomenon of non-attendance, attempts have been made to differentiate absence based on a variety of criterion (Reid, 2005). Such factors include, the period of absence, legitimacy, whether an absence is parentally condoned, the cause of the non-attendance, including psychological difficulties (Reid, 2005), and whether the absence is related to anti-school and anti-social characteristics (Havik, Bru and Ertesvåg, 2015).

2.4.1 A Psychological Discourse of Non-Attendance

Broadwin (1932) made an early distinction between truancy and absence that had an emotional foundation. Drawing on psychodynamic theory, this was constructed as a condition that manifested itself as anxiety associated with school: '[It] occurs in a child who is suffering from a deep-seated neurosis of the obsessional type or displays a neurotic character of the obsessional type,' (Broadwin, 1932, p. 254). Partridge (1939) similarly constructed school absence as a clinical difficulty and referred to psychoneurotic truancy attributed to the displacement of separation anxiety onto the

school setting. Concurrently, Johnson et al (1941) constructed this as a phobic reaction to the school setting due to separation anxiety and are thus credited with introducing the term school phobia.

This terminology reflects the early clinical etiology in the construction of absence (Egger, Costello and Angold, 2003). Separation anxiety remained a prevalent explanation for the emotional cause of non-attendance until the early 1960s (McShane, Walter and Rey, 2001). It continues to be popular with psychodynamic practitioners, generally considered more prominent amongst younger pupils (Elliot, 1999), with both this and school phobia being dominant discourses in the explanation of attendance difficulties (McShane, Walter and Rey, 2001). Theories focusing on separation anxiety however, have been criticised for being narrow (Lyon and Cotler, 2007) and of focusing on family pathology with a lack of interest in precipitating factors (Pilkington and Piesel, 1991). Furthermore, the research that has supported this theory has been subject to criticisms of methodological weaknesses regarding the limitations of a clinical sample (Lyon and Cotler, 2007; Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008). Indeed, a comparatively low rate of separation anxiety is reported as being evident in non-clinical groups (Egger, Costello and Angold, 2003).

This is not to deny the emotional distress that is suffered by a significant proportion of non-attenders. McShane, Walter and Rey, (2001) state that a high prevalence of mood disorders has been shown amongst this population with anxiety exhibited predominantly in children, and anxiety and depression in adolescents. Freemont (2003) cites a number of prevalent comorbid psychiatric disorders in the school refuser population, which similarly includes anxiety and mood disorders, but also disruptive behaviour disorders. Lyon and Cotler (2007) however, found that 75% of children

considered 'truants' or 'school refusers' did not meet the criteria for a psychological disorder. This contradiction may be the consequence of how this research has been conducted:

'Studies on school refusal have often been limited by small sample size, an emphasis on out-patient groups, lack of comprehensive diagnostic information and negligible data about precipitants.'

(McShane, Walter and Rey, 2001, p. 823).

2.4.2 A Diagnostic Distinction

The construction of school refusal as an aspect of behaviour that is characteristic of a behavioural or emotional disorder, rather than a distinct clinical entity, is reflected in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual Version 5 (DSM V, American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Here it is included as a diagnostic 'symptom' of Separation Anxiety Disorder but not as a clinical diagnosis in itself: 'Persistent reluctance or refusal to go out, be away from home, go to school, go to work, or elsewhere because of fear of separation,' (DSM-V, 2013, p.190). The International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10, World Health Organisation, 2016), however, does not include school refusal as either a discrete diagnosis or diagnostic symptom. Truancy is specified as a criterion for the measure of the severity of Conduct Disorder (DSM-V) and Socialized Conduct disorder (ICD-10) in the respective publications.

2.4.3 A Descriptive Construction

Hersov (1960, 1977), is credited with moving the focus from a clinical condition to a descriptive construction of non-attendance, whilst acknowledging that there may be an emotional foundation to the difficulty (Egger, Costello and Angold, 2003). Hersov (1977) provided a description of the behaviour of the school refuser:

‘The problem often starts with vague complaints about school or reluctance to go to school or to remain in school in the face of persuasion, entreaty, recrimination and punishment...the behaviour may be accompanied by overt signs of anxiety or even panic when the time comes to go to school and most children cannot leave home to set out for school.’

(Hersov, 1977: p 458)

This was later corroborated by Blagg (1987) who referenced the somatic symptomology that can accompany school non-attendance behaviour. Such somatic symptoms may present in varied ways including autonomic, gastrointestinal and/or muscular complaints (Freemont, 2003: Table 5):

Autonomic	Gastrointestinal	Muscular
Dizziness	Abdominal pain	Back pain
Diaphoresis	Nausea	Joint pain
Headaches	Vomiting	
Shaking/trembling	Diarrhoea	
Palpitations		
Chest Pains		

Table 5: Somatic Symptoms in Children and Adolescents with School Refusal

(Freemont, 2003)

2.5 Truancy and School Non-Attendance

An alternative to the medical discourses of school non-attendance is found in the discourse of truancy from school. The distinction in the construction of truancy and other school absence has been recognised historically by psychiatrists who have termed other school non-attendance as school refusal (Lauchlan, 2003); such a distinction is considered an important differential by some (Thambirajah, Grandison

and De-Hayes, 2008). Definitions of the construction of non-attendance used in recent studies point to their concurrence with the distinction in medical discourse that non-attenders who demonstrate anti-social behaviour or have a diagnosis of conduct disorder are excluded from the research (Egger, Costello and Angold, 2003). Indeed, Heyne et al (2013) state that non-attendance driven by anxiety and that classified as truancy follow different developmental paths and so should be distinguished to inform appropriate intervention. Freemont (2003) provides a summary of the diagnostic characteristics that distinguish the two prevalent terms (Table 6):

School Refusal	Truancy
Severe emotional distress in relation to attending school; anxiety, depression, and/or somatic symptoms.	Lack of excessive fear about attending school.
Parents are aware of absence	Parents are often not aware of absence; child often actively attempts to conceal absence from parents.
Child does not display significant anti-social behaviour.	Frequent anti-social behaviour; often in the company of anti-social peers.
Child usually stays at home during the school day.	Child is often away from home during the school day.
Child is willing to complete school work in the home environment.	Child shows a lack of interest in school work and is unwilling to conform to academic and behaviour expectations.

Table 6: Criteria for Diagnosis of School Refusal and Truancy

(Summarised from Freemont, 2003)

2.6 The Nomenclature of School Non-Attendance

Given the complexities in the discourses constructing school non-attendance, it is unsurprising that there are a number of contested terms used to describe pupils with persistent absence from school. The term school refusal is employed in some of the literature concerned with non-attendance, (Berg, Nichols and Prichard, 1969; Berg, 1997, 2002; Elliot, 1999; McShane, Walter and Rey, 2001, Thambirajah, Grandison

and De-Hayes 2008), based on the expectation that school refusers experience strong, negative emotions in association with school and that truants are unlikely to be excessively anxious (Elliot, 1999). On this premise, Berg, Nichols and Prichard (1969) set out specific characteristics of the construct of school refusal (Table 7), which have been adopted in subsequent research to demarcate the school refusal and truancy dyad (Berg, 1997, 2002; Elliot, 1999; Heyne 2008):

Defining Characteristics of School Refusal	
1	The seeking of the comfort and security of home, preferring to remain close to parental Figures, especially during school hours.
2	Display of evidence of emotional upset when faced with the prospect of having to attend school, although this may only take the form of unexplained physical symptoms.
3	No manifestation of severe antisocial tendencies, apart from possible aggressiveness when attempts are made to force school attendance.
4	Does not attempt to conceal the problem from parents.

Table 7: Defining Characteristics of School Refusal, summarised from Berg (1997)

In order to classify the presenting attendance difficulty, Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes (2008) adopt similar criteria to that of Berg (1997). This is represented in a flowchart to delineate school refusal as distinct from truancy and parentally condoned school non-attendance (Figure 2).

An alternative term found in the literature is school phobia. Archer, Filmer-Sankey and Fletcher-Campbell (2003) differentiate school phobia from school refusal, positioning the former as anxiety driven and the latter a result of lack of motivation. Conversely, others refer specifically to anxiety-based school refusal, defined as, 'A type of attendance problem characterised by the young person having difficulty attending school and experiencing problematic levels of anxiety,' (Heyne, Sauter and van Hout, 2011, p. 870).

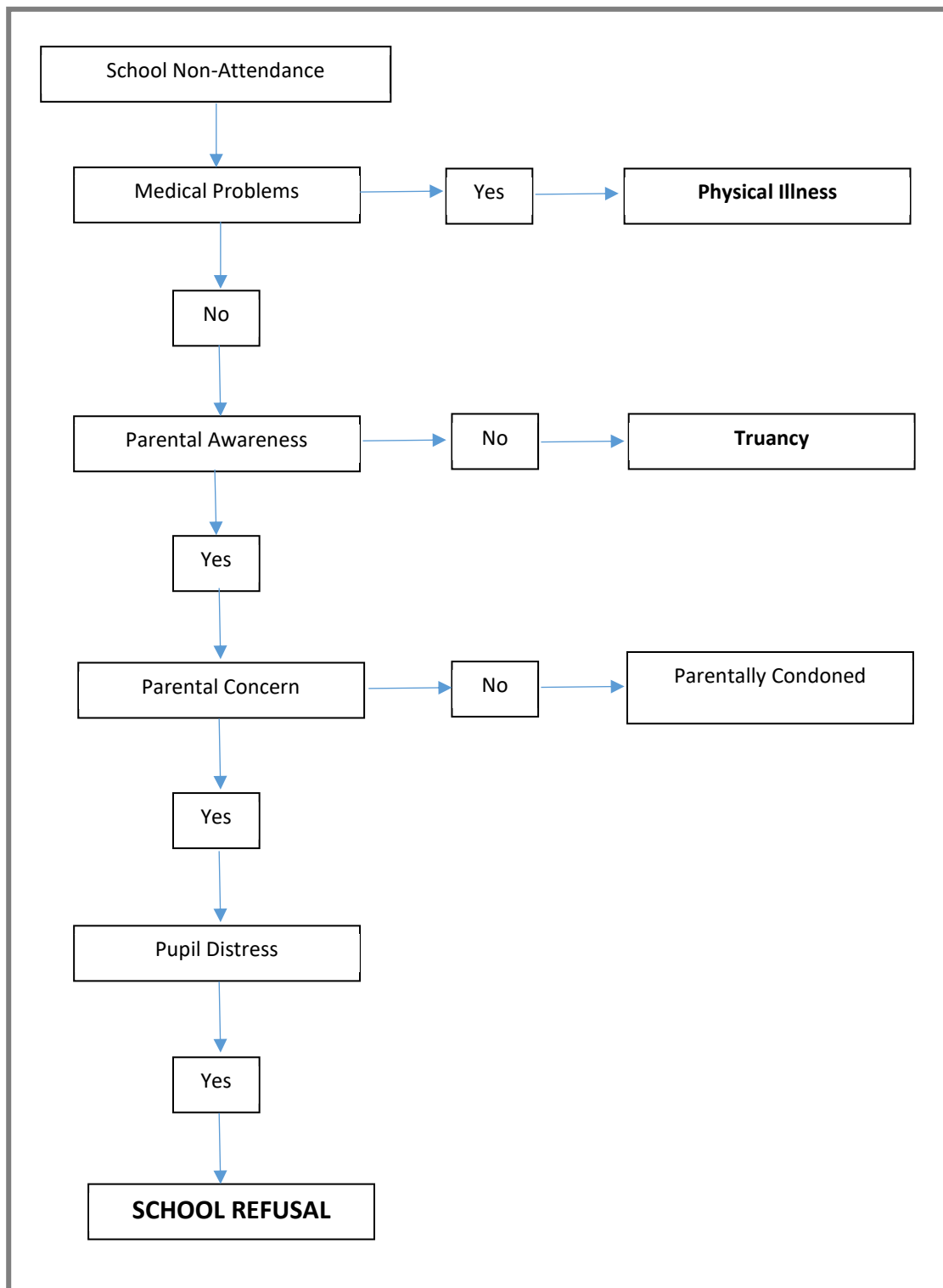


Fig 2: Flowchart of School Non-Attendance Classification
(Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008)

In terms of the distinction applied by Archer, Filmer-Sankay and Fletcher-Campbell (2003) however, this construction of non-attendance would be labelled as school phobia.

Conversely, King and Bernstein (2001) advocate that the use of school refusal is now so widely accepted that it has superseded the use of school phobia as a relevant term. Further complexity is introduced however, by the use of school refusal as an overarching term to describe all non-attendance, regardless of the nature of the absence (King, Ollendick and Tongue, 1995; Kearney and Silverman 1996, 1999; Lyon and Cotler, 2007). Heyne and Sauter (2013) define this as a psychosocial problem characterised by a child or adolescent's difficulty attending school and, in many cases, substantial absence from school. In doing so, it is recognised that the absence can become extensive that is not evident in the characteristics defined by Berg, Nichols and Prichard (1969: Table 7).

Kearney (2001) specified that school refusal behaviour is characterised by, 'Child motivated refusal to attend school or difficulties remaining in school for the entire day' (p. 345). This construction is linked to a continuum of non-attendance, which specifies behavioural descriptors of the severity of the attendance difficulty (Kearney 2001: Figure 3). Whilst this is a useful descriptor, which recognises the often progressive nature of non-attendance, it should not be assumed that this is a linear process; indeed, research conducted by Egger, Costello and Angold (2003) reflects non-attendance as a fluid entity, which can present differently on a daily basis.

•	•	•	•	•	•	•
School attendance under duress	Repeated behavioural difficulties in the mornings to avoid school	Repeated tardiness in the morning followed by attendance	Periodic absence or missing of classes	Repeated absences or missing of classes mixed with some attendance	Complete absence from school during a specific period of the school year.	Complete absence from school for an extended period of time

Fig. 3 Continuum of School Refusal Behaviour Based on Attendance (Kearney, 2001)

Kearney (2008) subsequently offered a construction of non-attendance that aimed to quantify the difficulty in terms of what measurably constitutes school refusal behaviour (Table 8). Whilst endeavouring to reduce ambiguity through the application of numerical parameters however, obscurity remains in the use of vocabulary such as ‘severe difficulty’ with no specification given as to what qualifies as such. Indeed Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes (2008) state that a range of numerical attendance criteria are used in schools and thus achieving an, ‘...operational definition of the term school refusal is beset with difficulties,’ (p.130).

Criteria for School Refusal Behaviour	
1	Missing in excess of 25% of school in a two week period
2	Experiencing severe difficulty in attending school in a two week period
3	More than 10 days or 15% non-attendance in a 15 week period

Table 8: Construction of School Refusal Behaviour (Kearney, 2008)

2.6.1 The Negativity of Nomenclature

It is evident, that there is considerable diversity in the construction of non-attendance in the terms employed and in the aligned discourse. It is claimed that such pervasive difficulties in the nomenclature of school absence has resulted in negative

consequences for those experiencing the difficulty and those wishing to understand it (Elliot, 1999; Place et al, 2000; Kearney, 2002; Lauchlan, 2003; Lyon and Cotler, 2007). Indeed, it is suggested that such a lack of consensus and the plethora of constructions have impeded clinicians in the assessment and treatment of this population (Kearney and Albano, 2004). Furthermore, Lyon and Cotler (2007) conclude that such a distinction often prevents support being given to those in need:

‘Although the truancy/school refusal distinction is increasingly seen as artificial [it] continues to have negative impact because the terms carry different connotations and consequences.’

(Lyon and Cotler, 2007, p. 559)

Such connotations are cited as the wilful behaviour aligned with school refusal and the psychopathology connoted by the term school phobia, due to the psychological disorder associated with the term ‘phobia’ (Pellegrini, 2007). Whilst Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes (2008) claim to use the term school refusal as descriptive of behaviour, rather than suggestive of the cause, such neutrality in this respect cannot be assumed; the construction of the reasons for school non-attendance will inherently be influenced by the associated inferences of the terminology used.

Equally, the complexities in the construction of school absence may be attributed to the etiological explanations that fail to account for the range of presenting attendance difficulties and that the aligned ‘disorders’ do not present as mutually exclusive diagnostic criteria (Lyons and Cotler, 2007). Whilst anxiety has been constructed by some as synonymous with school refusal or school phobia and conduct disorder with truancy, research has shown a sub-set of this population that exhibit behaviours or

‘symptoms’ incongruent to their ascribed non-attendance label (Bools, et al, 1990; Berg, 1993; Egger, Costello and Angold, 2003). Moreover, the profile of the non-attender may shift between the anxiety and anti-social behaviour to present as an anxious truant or truanting school refuser, whilst others do not show any significant clinical characteristics (Egger, Costello and Angold, 2003). Kearney (2008) concluded therefore, that the definitions used lack the fluidity to conceptualise the population of school non-attenders. Consequently, the attribution of such labels in the discourse of school non-attendance can be positioned as obstructive in understanding and tackling attendance difficulties (Lauchlan, 2003).’

The findings of an exploration of non-attendance across 60 local authorities in England reflected that these difficulties are experienced by frontline practitioners in education and impact on the understanding and strategic support afforded to non-attending pupils by school staff and wider education professionals:

‘The research revealed no clear definitions among practitioners in LEAs and schools that distinguished between school phobics and school refusers. Common descriptions were of the broad group of pupils to whom practitioners applied the terms ‘phobic’ and ‘refuser’. These descriptions included pupils with acute anxiety about attending school, pupils who cannot face school and pupils who persistently refuse to attend.’

(Archer, Filmer-Sankey and Fletcher-Campbell, 2003, p. 26)

With regards to the naming of non-attendance therefore, it is apparent that the lack of cohesiveness in nomenclature has negative consequences for the pupils experiencing

this phenomenon and that a singular term is inadequate in conceptualising the reasons for school absence.

2.7 A Functional Construction

Concerns regarding the lack of consensus regarding the terminology of school non-attendance prompted a move in the 1990s to construct this phenomenon in terms of the function that it serves for the young person (Kearney and Silverman, 1996; Elliot 1999; Gregory and Purcell, 2014). In an endeavour to improve the cohesiveness of the classification of non-attendance, Kearney and Silverman (1996) developed a model to categorise the functions of school refusal behaviour that aimed to, ‘...reconcile aspects of early (e.g. phobia, separation anxiety, operant influences) and contemporary (e.g. concurrent validity with externalizing-externalizing dimensions and categories) attempts to classify absenteeism,’ (Kearney, 2002, p. 347).

Based on a categorical and dimensional hierarchy of non-attendance, this model positioned school refusal behaviour as serving four distinct functions and providing either negative or positive reinforcement for the pupil (Table 9):

Categorising Functions of School Refusal Behaviour		
Function 1	Avoid school related stimuli that provoke a general sense of negative affectivity (i.e. anxiety and depression)	Negative reinforcement
Function 2	Escape school-related aversive social and/or evaluative situations	
Function 3	Gain attention from significant others	Positive reinforcement
Function 4	Pursue tangible reinforcement outside school	

Table 9: Categorising Functions of School Refusal Behaviour
(summarised from Kearney and Albano, 2004)

Non-attendance was further categorised in terms of whether it is problematic or non-problematic, chronic or acute and child or parent motivated (Kearney and Silverman, 1996); this further categorisation was presented as a, '...categorical-dimensional taxonomic hierarchy for youngsters with school refusal behaviour,' (p. 346: Figure 4). On this basis, Kearney (2006) advocates that a functional analysis is carried out to align appropriate intervention through attaining an insight into to the functional need that is being served by the non-attendance and thus the pupil need that is being met. This model subsequently informed the development of the School Refusal Assessment Scale (SRAS), which is used in schools to assess pupils who are non-attending via a parent and pupil questionnaire (Kearney and Silverman, 1993; Kearney 2002; Kearney and Albano, 2007).

The functional model of non-attendance however, has been subject to a degree of critique due to the lack of a cognitive explanation for school refusal (Nuttall and Woods, 2013) despite research that suggests the negative impact of thought processes:

'Negative cognition is a risk factor for school refusal. Even when controlling for anxiety, school refusers reported more negative automatic thoughts of personal failure, and the presence of school refusal was predicted by thoughts of personal failure and by the cognitive error of overgeneralizing.'

(Maric et al, 2012, p.266)

Whilst directional causality cannot be claimed, negative cognitions are constructed by the authors as concurrent with school refusal and a reason for or a maintaining factor of non-attendance, thus indicating the need to consider cognitive processes in addition to functionality.

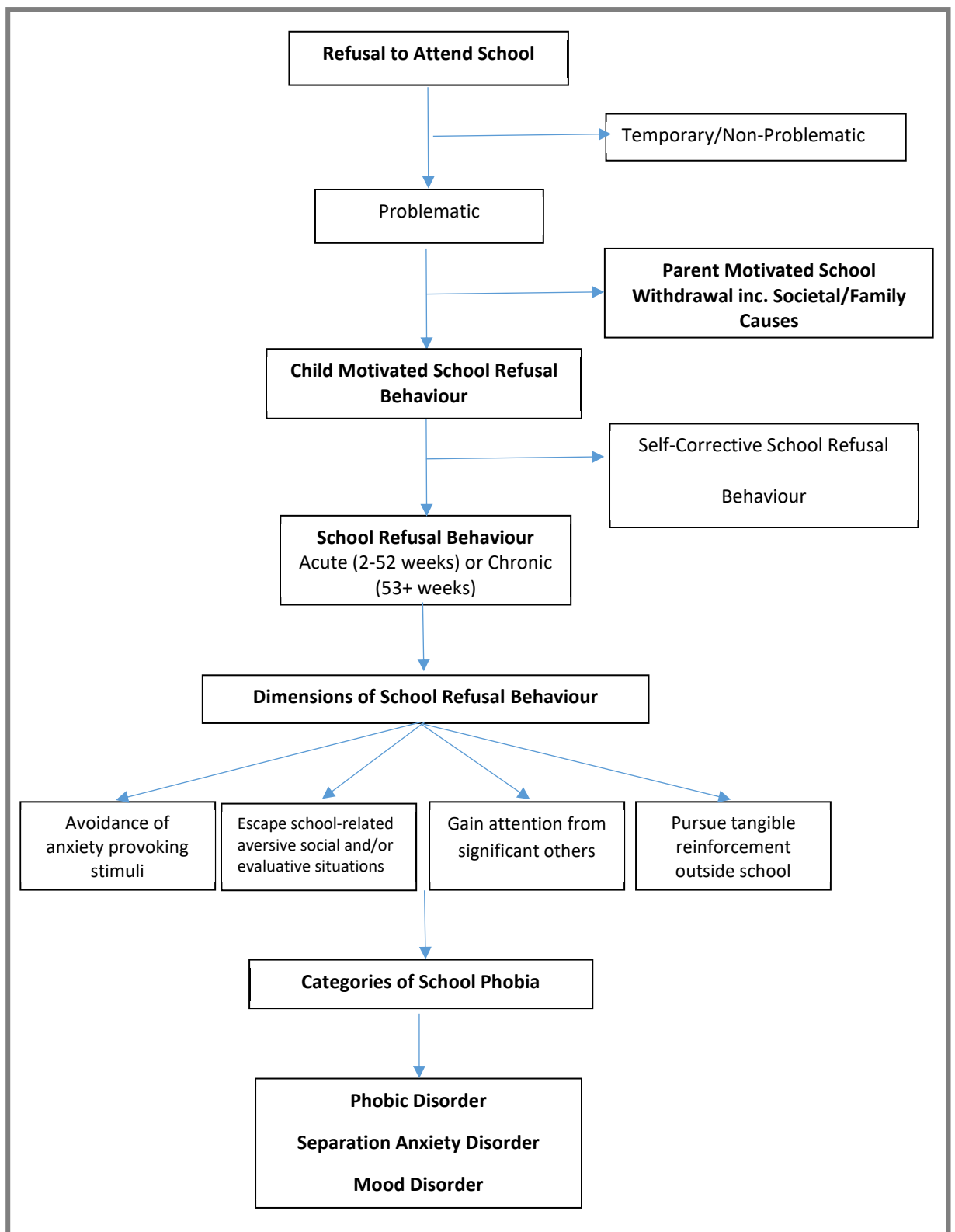


Fig. 4: Categorical-Dimensional Taxonomic Hierarchy for Youngsters with School Refusal Behaviour
(Kearney and Silverman 1996)

Furthermore, the similarity of these functions to the behaviour associated with non-attendance in the clinical model have been noted (Havik, Bru and Ertesvåg, 2014: Table 10). In this respect, whilst the focus has apparently shifted to the function of the behaviour, it is questionable how much the corresponding assumptions of the prevalent terminology and the dominant discourses have been impacted by this, in terms of the construction of the attendance difficulty and the subsequent choice of intervention.

Function of Non-Attendance	Aligned Terminology
Avoid school related stimuli that provoke a general sense of negative affectivity (i.e. anxiety and depression)	School Refusal
Escape school-related aversive social and/or evaluative situations	School Refusal
Gain attention from significant others	Separation Anxiety
Pursue tangible reinforcement outside school	Truancy

Table 10: Functions of Non-Attendance Aligned with the Terminology of Non-attendance

(Havik, Bru and Ertesvåg, 2014)

2.8 The Function of Discourses of Non-attendance

Several authors have pointed to how the medical discourse of school non-attendance is effective in constructing and maintaining non-attendance as a ‘with-in’ child (Pellegrini, 2007; Gregory and Purcell, 2014) and ‘with-in’ family (Elliot, 1999) difficulty. This is further perpetuated by constructions that refer to ‘child motivated’ reasons for non-attendance (Kearney, 2001). The legal discourse similarly constructs non-attendance as a problem within the family, in which the parents are positioned as being

responsible for the pupil's attendance with the child assuming a passive role, which results in punitive actions rather than therapeutic interventions. (Lyon and Cotler, 2007; Pellegrini, 2007).

Furthermore, the construction of different 'types' of non-attendance and the associated pathology and accompanying discourses, can result in the formulation of misleading hypothesis and the attribution of distorted explanations for pupil absence (Pellegrini 2007). Equally, Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, (2008) report that the delay experienced by many pupils while the nature of the non-attendance is explored is detrimental to a resolution of the attendance problem and positive outcomes for the pupil. This is of particular concern in light of the importance of early intervention in relation to a positive prognosis.

Not only does this confusion serve to inform or misinform intervention and delay the provision of appropriate support or 'treatment' programmes, the prevailing discourses delineate attention from factors in the pupils' wider environment, including the school system (Elliot, 1999; Gregory and Purcell, 2014) despite children rarely identifying home factors as a reason for their non-attendance (Malcolm et al, 2003). Interestingly however, Malcolm et al (2003) reported that school staff predominantly locate the difficulty within the child and/or family. Archer, Filmer-Sankey and Fletcher-Campbell (2003), found that in staff constructions of school non-attendance '...it was generally felt that, while school factors could trigger school refusal or phobia, the origins of the problem usually lay in the home,' (p. iv). These discourses therefore, serve to construct the origin of the problem and have implications for intervention and legal redress.

2.9 A Multi-Factorial Construction of School Non-Attendance

Contextual influences therefore are often neglected when considering school non-attendance (Lyon and Cotler, 2007; Place et al, 2000). Whilst some research has considered the influence of the role of the family in attendance difficulties, Lyon and Cotler (2007) point out that this rarely includes those who do not meet a clinical threshold for the classification of their difficulty. Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes (2008) however, contend that it is not possible to determine a single factor that explains the cause of school refusal and thus systemic factors must be explored:

‘Understanding the interaction between environmental factors, the family and the child is necessary to promote proper understanding of the nature of SR [school refusal] and generate strategies for its effective management and prevention.’

(Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008, p.36).

2.9.1 A Systemic Model of Development

It is widely recognised that children develop in a number of systems including the family and school environments. This is depicted in Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model, which presents the development of the biologically maturing child in the multi-systemic context of their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). In this model, both the school and family sit in the immediate environment of the child in the surrounding microsystem (Figure 5). From this perspective therefore, within child explanations of school non-attendance that neglect to recognise systemic contributory factors neglect to consider such systemic influences in relation to attendance difficulties.

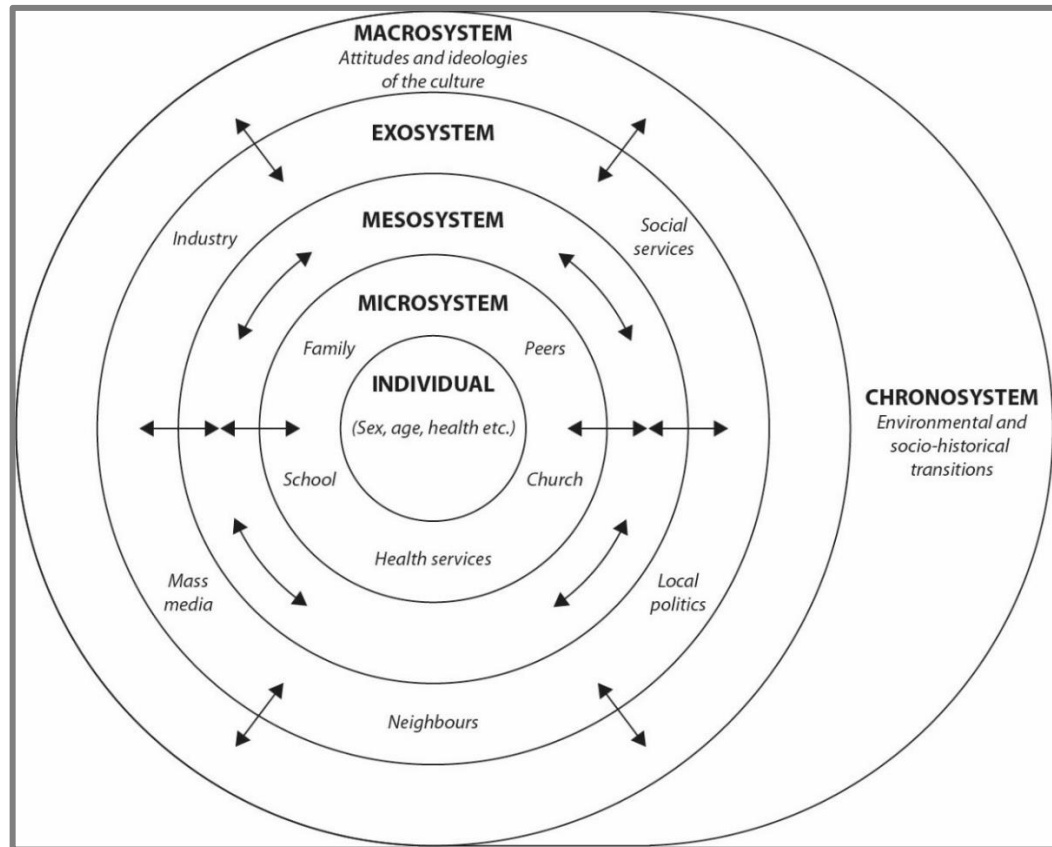


Fig. 5: Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Development System (2005)

In the context of this model, Nutall and Woods (2013) directly relate the complexities of attendance difficulties to four main areas; psychological, family, professional and systemic factors.

Lyon and Cotler (2007) further consider the role of systemic factors in the child's mesosystem (Figure 5). They suggest that, whilst the family and school have been considered separately to some degree, the connectedness between the two systems has rarely been deliberated, despite this being positioned as an integral factor in identification and support of pupils:

‘... consequent lack of communication between parents and schools can inhibit the timely resolution of school refusal behaviour. There may be delays in identification for school refusers, fewer referrals to professionals for treatment and no coordinated plan to increase attendance.’

(Lyon and Cotler, 2007, p.558)

The level of communication between the school and home is often influenced by the value placed on education within the family, such that ‘...parents who do not place a high premium on education are less likely to interface with school on a regular basis,’ (Lyon and Cotler, 2007, p.558).

2.9.2 A Comprehensive Model of Problematic School Absenteeism

Kearney (2008) endeavoured to develop a systemic model that incorporated the continuum of school absenteeism (Figure 3), which recognised, ‘A comprehensive model of problematic school absenteeism must therefore include consideration of larger systemic factors,’ (p. 260). In this systemic construction of school non-attendance, all factors affecting the attending behaviour and a reciprocal relationship of influence is established between the individual and contextual factors (Figure 6).

Kearney (2008) presents an interesting change in the construction of problematic absenteeism in this model, in light of the definition previously offered by this researcher that constructed school refusal as ‘child motivated’, the categorisation of which resulted in a clinical description of the difficulty (Figure 4).

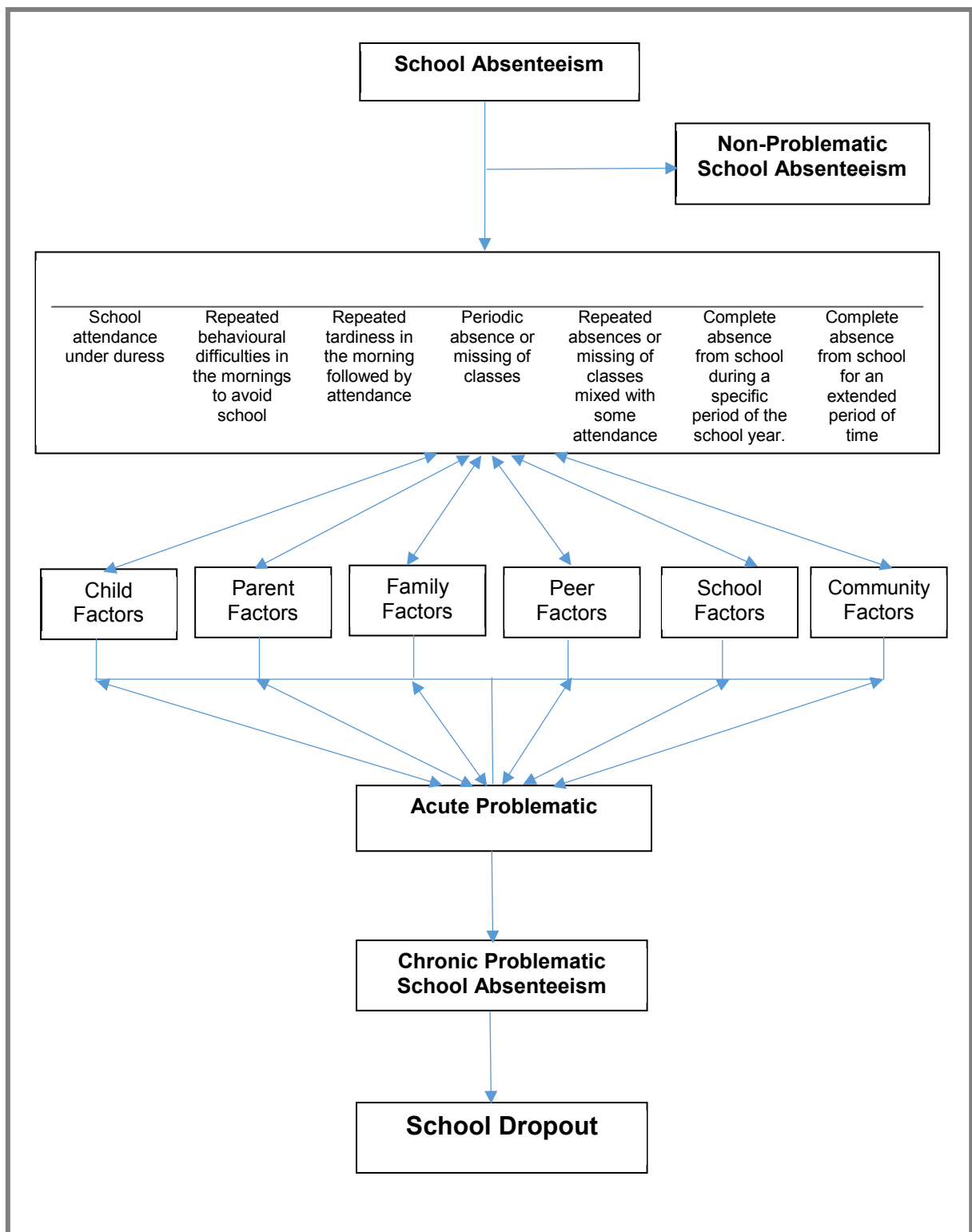


Fig. 6: A Comprehensive Model of Problematic School Absenteeism (Kearney, 2008)

2.9.3 Predominant Contributory Factors

Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, (2008) offer a summary of the predominant contributory factors in relation to the child and the developmental systems (Table 11) and recognise the heterogeneous nature of this population due to the ‘...unique combination of various factors and their interaction that leads to SNA [school non-attendance],’ (p. 33). In view of this, they construct a dynamic model of the occurrence of school refusal and propose:

‘SR [school refusal] occurs when stress exceeds support, when risks are greater than resilience and when ‘pull’ factors that promote SNA [school non-attendance] overcome the ‘push’ factors that encourage attendance’.

(Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008, p. 33)

School	Child	Family
Bullying Transition (to secondary or change of school) Unidentified learning needs Inadequate provision for SEND Subject specific difficulties Peer relationship problems Activity specific difficulties	Separation difficulties Anxiety in peer relationships Fear of failure Lack of self confidence Developmental problems Fear of parental separation Over-dependence on parents Concerns about parental well-being	Recent transitions e.g. divorce, relocation Recent family loss Changes in the family Parental anxiety and/or other mental health difficulties Lack of involvement of the father Level of parental stress in relation to child's anxiety and school refusal Parental over involvement or overprotection.

Table 11. Common Factors involved in School Refusal (summarised from Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, (2008).

Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes (2008) construct a ‘typical profile of the school refuser’ (p. 34), which whilst being contradictory to the acknowledged heterogeneity of this population, includes

‘Other developmental problems such as autism spectrum disorders are sometimes a contributory factor, especially when the problems are subtle and remain unidentified.’

(Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008, p. 34)

This statement should be considered however with regard to the lack of research regarding the prevalence of an Autistim Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and ‘school refusal behaviour’. Nonetheless, a recent study by Munkhaugen et al, (2017) cites data from systemic sources in Sweden that reports such behaviour as problematic amongst this population. The findings of this research construct having ASD as, ‘...a major risk factor for displaying school refusal behaviour in students aged 9-16 years,’ (p. 37) and that this disorder further impacts on the severity and duration of the attendance difficulties.

Family factors appear to focus on the functionality of the system and the parents’ capacity to manage and support their child’s difficulties (McShane, Walter and Rey, 2001; Goodman and Scott, 2012). This is in the context of significant events that impact on the family system that increase stressors on the relational dynamics in the family. Carless et al (2013) considers family factors specifically in relation to parental self-efficacy and competent parenting practices, which impact on the parents’ capacity to manage the difficulty and their perseverance in supporting school attendance.

Of the school factors, peer bullying is identified as a precipitating factor (Lauchlan, 2003; Goodman and Scott, 2012), and constructed by Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes (2008) as the most common contributory factor, such that the experience damages the developing sense of self and can lead to social exclusion. Also constructed as significant is the school environment, with the size, disruption and fear

of unmonitored areas being reported as causing difficulty, in addition to difficulties with teachers (Lauchlan, 2003). The construction of such factors influencing attendance difficulties has some consistency with the findings of Archer, Filmer-Sankey and Fletcher-Campbell (2003), which also cite the school environment as a significant problem in addition to social anxiety and changes in pupil groupings. Few studies however, systematically evaluate the influence of school factors on school attendance (Goodman and Scott, 2012); regarding school size for example, Havik, Bru and Ertesvåg, (2015) cite conflicting evidence and thus conclude this factor is 'somewhat equivocal' in relation to school refusal.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, school transition points for pupils are recognised as an antecedent to school non-attendance with peaks occurring at the move to primary and secondary phases of education (Pellegrini, 2007; Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008; Goodman and Scott, 2012; Nutall and Woods, 2013). Whilst this may be attributable to the factors previously mentioned, Goodman and Scott (2012) suggest that the transition to secondary school may be a peak amongst older children, '...partly because it is harder to compel them to attend against their will,' (p.89) due to it being easier to physically 'deliver' a younger child to an educational setting. Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes (2008), however, construct a drop in performance and motivation, referred to as the 'Cross-phase dip', as a contributory factor to attendance difficulties at transition points. Similarly, Kearney (2008) refers to, '...poorly tailored academic curricula and student boredom.' (p. 262), which leads to a sense of lack of connectedness to school and subsequently school non-attendance.

2.9.4 Perpetuating Cycle of Non-Attendance

It is recognised by Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, (2008), that the factors that predispose the young person to experiencing school non-attendance, may differ from those that precipitate and perpetuate the absence. This may be aligned with the findings of Egger, Costello and Angold, 2003 (2003) regarding the changing reasons for attendance difficulties.

Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, (2008), refer to a 'Vicious Cycle of School Refusal' that maintains the difficulty in attending (Figure 7):

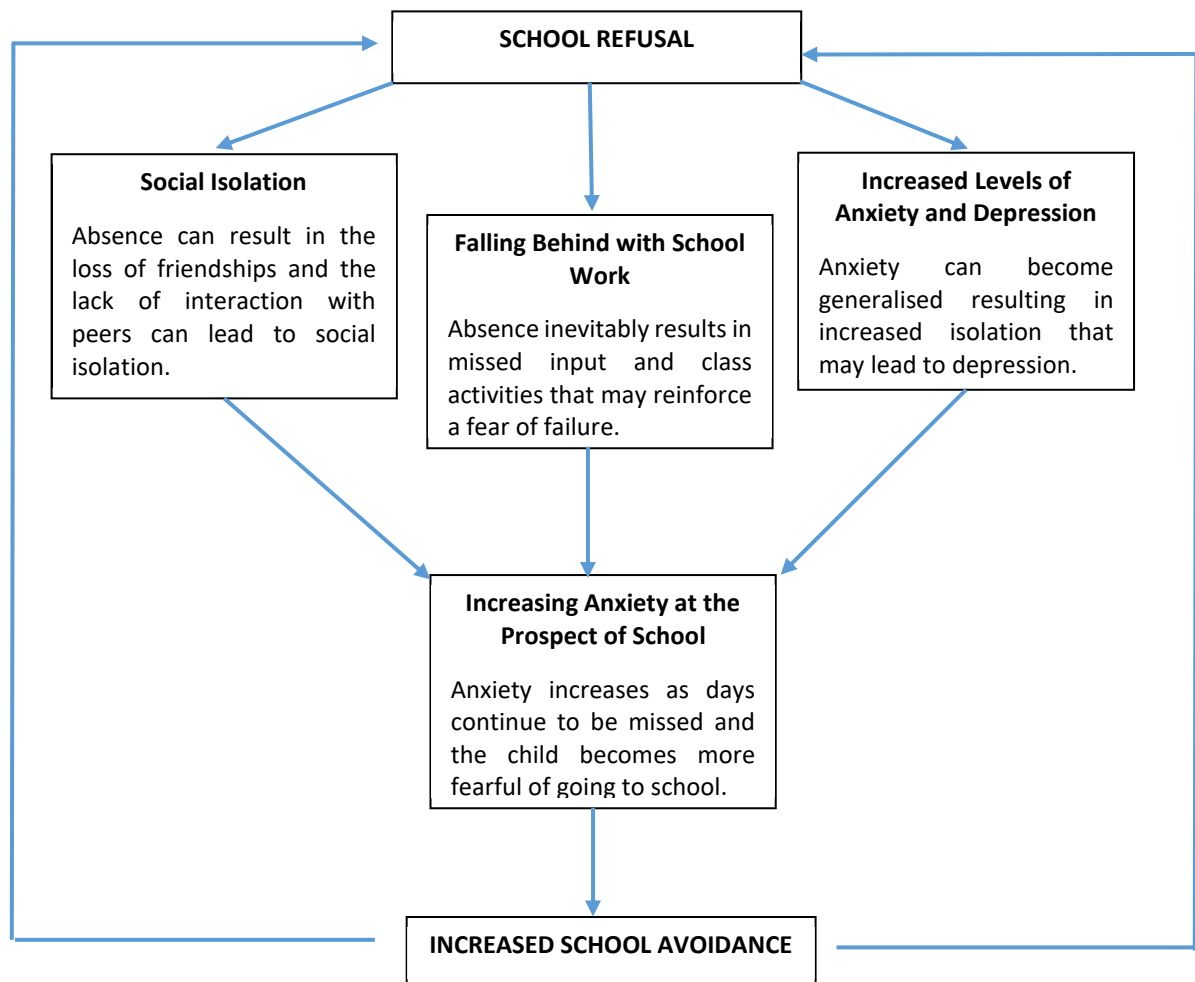


Fig. 7: The Vicious Cycle of School Refusal (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008)

This is typified by increased levels of anxiety and depression due to the social isolation brought through school absence and by increasingly falling behind academically. Subsequently, one or more of these factors result in an increased anxiety at the prospect of attending school and a negatively reinforcing pattern of behaviour and the resulting difficulties are established. Some of these accumulative difficulties are constructed as perpetuating factors by Goodman and Scott (2012) who refer to the social difficulty brought by a lack of contact with friends and the difficulty pupil's experience in explaining periods of absence to others.

The factors presented are of interest and it is appropriate to consider the multi-causal nature of ESNA, rather than maintain the focus on a within child difficulty. It should be noted however, that Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, (2008) ultimately construct anxiety as the cause of school refusal (Figure 8):

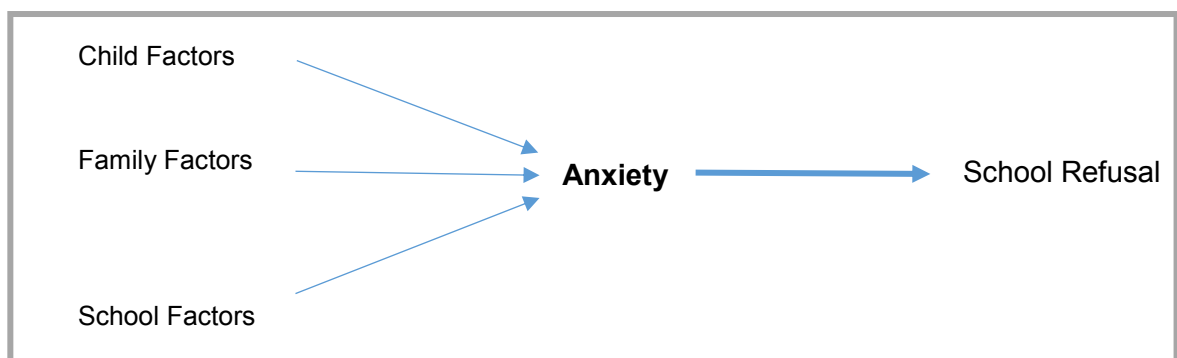


Fig 8: Framework for Understanding School Refusal

(Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008)

2.10 Support and Intervention for School Non-Attendance

The lack of consensus in how to define and construct non-school attendance is reflected in a lack of consensus regarding assessment and intervention strategies. Thus the differentials in the construction of school non-attendance, impact on the provision and support for this group (Kearney, 2008). Indeed, Archer, Filmer-Sankey and Fletcher-Campbell, (2003) found that in the early stages of intervention, ‘...there were common strategies that were applied regardless of the particular category in which a child might nominally be put,’ (p. 260), thus indicating that there is little regard for the individual presentation at this point, despite the known heterogeneity of the population. This is further reflected in the clinical perspective regarding the main aim of intervention with non-attending pupils: ‘The primary treatment goal for children with school refusal is an early return to school,’ (Freemont, 2003, p. 1558).

Delays during the initial non-attendance in receiving support and understanding are experienced by many pupils while the nature of the attendance is explored and this can be detrimental to a positive resolution of the difficulty (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008; Baker and Bishop, 2015). This is of particular concern in light of the importance of early intervention in relation to a positive prognosis (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008; Goodman and Scott, 2012; Nutall and Woods, 2013; Baker and Bishop 2015). The overall approach to intervention therefore, is suggestive of, ‘...a system that is quick to demand a return to normal but otherwise slow to respond,’ (Baker and Bishop, 365).

2.10.1 Intervention and Support

In consideration of the multi-factorial and systemic nature of the attendance difficulties, it is considered that a multi-systemic approach is most appropriate to facilitate a return

to school through effective collaboration between professionals (Archer, Filmer-Sankey and Fletcher-Campbell, 2003; Lauchlan, 2003; Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008; Nutall and Woods, 2013). Nutall and Woods (2013) present this as an Ecological Model of Successful Reintegration; due to the heterogeneity however, of presenting needs, it is equally recognised that the individual presentation should be considered. Indeed, Lauchlan concludes:

‘In this present climate it appears that the most appropriate and effective method in dealing with chronic non-attendance is to design an individualised intervention programme, according to a pupil’s particular needs but involving a multi-systemic approach.’

(Lauchlan, 2003, p. 144)

2.10.1.1 Approaches to Intervention

Provision focused on prevention of school non-attendance are deemed similar to those that are considered to be effective when the specific difficulty is identified (Archer, Filmer-Sankey and Fletcher-Campbell, 2003):

- early action on non-attendance;
- extensive pastoral consultation within the school;
- support at school from another pupil or adult;
- provision of a safe environment in school; and
- whole school behaviour and anti-bullying policies (though there were no specific policies on school refusal or phobia).

It was also found to be important, as both a protective factor to prevent non-attendance and to facilitate reintegration to school, that pupils formed a trusted relationship with a member of staff and that this was maintained (Archer, Filmer-Sankey and Fletcher-

Campbell, 2003; Havik, Bru and Ertesvåg, 2015) and that they knew what was expected of them on their return to school (Archer, Filmer-Sankey and Fletcher-Campbell, 2003).

Lauchlan (2003) presents a summary of interventions to support the return to school of a non-attender, both at a systemic and individual level, through individually focused programmes, group work and systemic strategies (Table 12). The efficacy of these various interventions however, remains unclear due to a lack of systematic, empirical evaluation of such programmes (Elliot, 1999; Lauchlan, 2003). Furthermore, it is interesting to consider the reliance on cognitive behavioural techniques such that the ‘...knowledge of the role of cognitions in school refusal is virtually absent.’ (Maric et al, 2012, p. 263).

Individual Approaches	Group Approaches	Systemic
Cognitive Behavioural Techniques: Relaxation training Cognitive restructuring or self-statement training Graduated exposure Medication	Social skills training Parent teacher training	Peer support Teacher training in dealing with chronic non-attendance School-Pupil contracts

Table 12: Approaches to Intervention summarised from Lauchlan (2003).

The use of medication to support school attendance is controversial and there is a lack of convincing evidence to substantiate this (Elliot, 1999). It is generally considered that psychological or psychological and behavioural interventions are the preferred approaches and, if any pharmacological treatment is prescribed, this should be done in conjunction with these interventions (Freemont, 2003). It should be considered that as the ‘Vicious Cycle of School Refusal’ becomes entrenched and levels of anxiety and

depression increase (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008), a pharmacological intervention may be employed and as such may be related to comorbid psychiatric difficulties of pupils experiencing school refusal. Goodman and Scott (2012) however, claim that there is little evidence for the use of medication per se, either when school refusal is attributed to separation anxiety or to depression. Furthermore, they state that SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) are ineffective in the treatment of mood disorders in adolescents; this is contrary however, to the NICE guidelines, which recommends Fluoxetine as the first line of response with this age group if medication is required (NICE, 2018).

2.10.1.2 The Role of Professionals

As part of a multi-systemic approach, a number of professional may be involved in interventions which support pupils experiencing ESNA (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008: Figure 9). Goodman and Scott, (2012) specifically reference the importance of working with agencies including educational psychologists and a number of EP services have published 'pathways' of support for non-attending pupils, although these often assume an emotional basis to the attendance difficulty (Derbyshire EPS, n.d; West Sussex EPS, 2004).

Pellegrini (2007) suggests that EPs can work in a variety of ways, supporting the individual pupil as well as the family and school systems (Table 13). It is interesting to note however, that whilst there is a clear role for the educational psychologist in relation to attendance difficulties, less than half of the local authorities in the study conducted by Archer, Filmer-Sankey and Fletcher-Campbell (2003) involved EPs; as such educational psychologists may be viewed as an underutilised resource in this field.

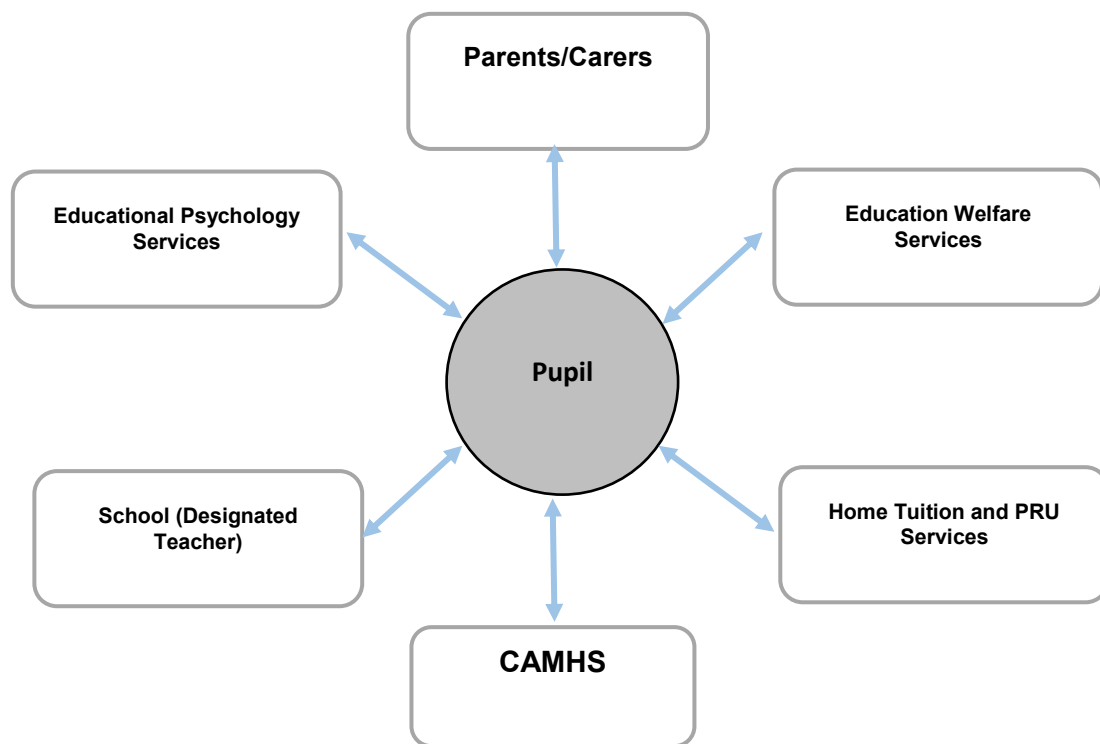


Fig. 9: Network of Professionals (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008).

Pupil	Family	School
<p>Assess pupils presenting needs to inform multi-agency decisions and intervention</p> <p>Implementation of interventions</p>	<p>Parenting training</p> <p>Model good practice in child 'management'</p>	<p>Training for staff on non-attendance</p> <p>Training on being inclusive for non-attenders and their families</p> <p>Mediator between school and families</p> <p>Run group CBT and social skills training</p>
<p>Facilitate a shared understanding of goals and approaches to intervention</p>		

Table 13: The Role of Educational Psychologists (Summarised from Pellegrini, 2007)

2.11 Delineating from Dominant Discourses: An Operational Term

Amongst the surfeit of terms available, an operational term of reference to be used in this study should be defined due to the ambiguous nature of the phraseology and assumed meaning, which has been discussed. Pellegrini (2007) employed the phrase 'extended school non-attendance' (ESNA) to diminish the causal discourses associated with other terminology and to offer a descriptor of the resulting behaviour aligned with the system in which it occurs. This has subsequently been employed by other researchers for whom school refusal does not provide an accurate description of their participant population (Gregory and Purcell, 2014). The term ESNA, in the context of this research, is informed by the inclusion criteria for the participants of the study, i.e. young people who have had difficulty in attending for an extended period rather than pupils who choose not to attend. It is therefore the term used in this research.

2.12 Research Questions

The broad research questions for this study were proposed prior to the completion of the literature review, in regards to an exploration of the term 'anxious non-attenders' and the presentation of this population within the LA. The subsequent review of the relevant literature exemplified the dominant discourses of non-attendance and the disparity in terminology employed to refer to such difficulties. The impact on support and intervention due to the associated etiology of these terms, and thus the construction of the causes of the school non-attendance, further supported the research questions of this study, which are as follows:

- How do young people, parent/carers and educators construct the reasons for extended school non-attendance?
- Is there a differential in the construction of the reasons for extended non-attendance between the participant groups?
- Is the term 'anxious non-attenders' consistent with the construction of the reasons for extended school non-attendance by the participant groups?

2.13 Chapter Summary

During the course of this chapter, the dominant legal and medical discourses of ESNA have been considered, with regard to the respective political and clinical historical contexts. The construction of ESNA as a within child difficulty however, fails to consider the multi-systemic environment in which the child develops.

The lack of consensus in the terminology used to describe attendance difficulties, brings complications in considering explanations and appropriate interventions for attendance difficulties, such that the connotations of the language employed has implications for the way in which the difficulty is constructed. It is recognised in the research however, that pupils experiencing ESNA are a heterogeneous population, which thus necessitates individualised assessment and intervention to support effective reintegration into school.

The following chapter will consider the philosophical orientation of this research and the aligned research methodology employed in this study to explore the discourses of the participant groups.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The research is framed as an exploratory qualitative study which explored the construction of the reasons for extended school non-attendance by pupils experiencing this phenomenon, their parents and school staff. The data was collected using unstructured interviews and a discourse analysis was performed on the resulting data set with the aim of answering the research questions shown in Table 14:

RQ1	How do young people, parent/carers and educators construct the reasons for extended school non-attendance?
RQ2	Is there a differential in the construction of the reasons for extended non-attendance between the participant groups?
RQ3	Is the term 'anxious non-attenders' consistent with the construction of the reasons for extended school non-attendance by the participant groups?

Table 14: Research Questions

The purpose of this chapter is to position the research within the respective philosophical framework to establish the epistemological, ontological and methodological premise that has guided this study. The research methodology is detailed, including participant sampling, recruitment and demographic of participants, the method of data collection and the procedure employed to analyse the data. The pertinent ethical issues will also be considered in relation to the relevant ethical guidelines.

3.2 Research Philosophy

The positivist paradigm, born out of the philosophy of Comte (1854), positions knowledge as discoverable through the empirical endeavour of quantitative research, which seeks to establish universally objective truths through observation and rationalisation (Cresswell, 1994; Stainton-Rogers and Willig, 2008). Such generalisable laws, or 'grand narratives', have been the pursuit of much psychological theory (Burr, 2015). This reflects the dominant political and scientific discourses that hold the experimental or natural sciences as, '...the crowning achievements of western civilisation (Carey, 1989, p. 99).

From this realist ontological perspective therefore, it is assumed that there exists a discoverable and definitive reality. The researcher is then positioned as an objective bystander whom '...in their practice it is assumed that "truth" can transcend opinion and personal bias,' (Carey, 1989, p. 99).

Alternative research paradigms evolved in the post-modern era of the mid-20th century and offered an opposing world view that criticised and questioned the assumptions of positivism concerning the nature of knowledge (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Social constructionism sits within this tradition and is aligned with a relativist ontology of multiple realities and a corresponding subjective epistemology that assumes an interpretivist role of the researcher. This orientation inherently rejects therefore the premise that there exists definitive, discoverable truths and a stable reality (Gergen, 2015).

The relativist position of social constructionism is underpinned by the contention that reality is situated within a historical, cultural and relational context that it is both specific to and produced by (Burr, 2015). To consider the focus of this study, if school

attendance is positioned in a historical context (Table 1), then it is evident from a social constructionist world view how the construct of school attendance has changed over time; until relatively recently, there was no educational provision for all children and so the issue of non-attendance was a non-entity. Non-attendance at school therefore, has only been constructed as a difficulty as the legislative stipulation to engage in suitable educational provision has been established.

Gergen (2015), emphasises that adopting a social constructionist ontology does not necessitate dismissing all that we hold to be real as false but rather, 'It is only because we socially construct that there are meaningful realities and valued actions,' (p. 6). From a social constructionist perspective therefore, '...what we take to be the truth about the world importantly depends on the social relationships of which we are part,' (Gergen, 2015, p. 30). Consequently, reality and our understanding of the world is created through social interactions that position language at the core of meaning, so that social constructions are inherently woven into the discourses employed.

The function of language therefore is more than merely one to express and label pre-existing knowledge in order to produce an accurate picture of the world. Language is only given meaning through social agreement regarding that which is attributed to the metaphor, and this is established through social relationships (Gergen, 2015). In social relationships, 'The words have come to function as "truth telling" within the rules of a particular game – or more generally, according to certain conventions of certain groups,' (Gergen, 2015, p. 11). These 'games' position discourses within a specific context that affords meaning to language, which can then be changed over time.

These social constructions are intrinsically connected to power relations in society in the legitimacy that is afforded to some social practices to the exclusion of others. This is embedded in the nature of discourse such that, 'Discourses are a matter of enactment and recognition,' (Gee, 2011, p. 178-179), through which groups and individuals are identified as being different kinds of people. To return to the focus of this study, school attendance is constructed as an expectation in our society, a social action that will be performed by children of a specified age group and as such, non-attendance is not legitimised but is rather pathologised as a difficulty to be overcome.

There is inevitable resistance to the social constructionism movement, from the positivist paradigm, which positions this alternative perspective to be '...an attack on reason and truth (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 12). Such critique is often directed at the qualitative methodologies aligned with the social constructionist epistemology and is concerned with the lack of verifiable evidence afforded by such approaches, in which '...researchers have no way of verifying their truth statements,' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 12) and also the resulting '...value laden nature of enquiry' brought by the researcher being positioned in the research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 13).

From a social constructionist perspective however, such statements are paradoxical to this philosophical position; the very notion of validating a single 'truth' is discordant with the ontological and epistemological beliefs that there are multiple 'truths' that exist concurrently and that hold meaning in the context in which they are constructed.

From this perspective, positivist 'truths', are '... but one way of telling stories about society or the social world' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p. 15). Conversely, the social

constructionist is liberated to ‘...see the utility in all ways of life, and to be both appreciatively curious and critical.’ (Gergen, 2015, p. 63).

All research is indeed considered to be ‘value laden’ such that, from this philosophical orientation, the researcher is inherently located within the research itself. Whilst it may be the aim of the empiricist to be devoid of the bias in order to present ‘objective’ findings, the social constructionist would perceive this as a fruitless endeavour.

The researcher therefore, cannot be separated from the research and thus neutrality is an impossible endeavour (Wetherall, Taylor and Yates, 2001). The reflexivity of ‘...the way that the researcher acts on the world and the world acts on the researcher, in a loop,’ (Wetherall, Taylor and Yates, 2001, p. 17), constitutes a cycle of mutual reciprocity of effect between the researcher and the participants. This necessitates that the researcher engages in continuous reflexive practice to become consciously aware of their value laden position such that ‘...one’s values and politics should not be hidden from view, including from oneself,’ (Gergen, 2015, p. 63). In doing so the researcher is actively, ‘Accepting the centrality of subjectivity,’ (Thomas 2017, p. 112) and thus acknowledging the inherent reflexivity and the role of reflective practice.

In the context of this research therefore, it was necessary to take a critically reflective stance in relation to the research and my subjective position within it. As such, a conscious iterative process was employed to reflect on my personal and professional values, in relation to the subject of ESNA and during the data collection and analysis.

3.3 Methodology

The research is framed as an exploratory qualitative study that examines how the reasons for ESNA are constructed through discourse by the three participant groups.

3.3.1 Discourse Analysis

The theory of discourse considers language as constructive (Potter and Wetherall; 1987; Wetherall, Taylor and Yates, 2001; Burman, 2008; Burr, 2015; Gergen, 2015); the analysis of discourse therefore, may be broadly defined as ‘...the close study of language in use,’ (Wetherall, Taylor and Yates, 2001, p.15). In practice however, such close study may describe, ‘...very different research activities with different kinds of data,’ (Wetherall, Taylor and Yates, 2001, p. 5). Indeed, the variety of analytical approaches that are described as discourse analysis creates a complexity in attempts to define the approach. Pomerantz (2008) however, concludes that ‘...a number of very different approaches exist and in research terms these approaches constitute more than methods,’ (p. 5), which is suggestive of the broader differentials between approaches being constitutive of more than the process of analysis. It is important therefore to position the analysis within the domain of discourse analysis.

In social constructionism, the function of language is considered at both a micro and macro level, which relate respectively to the mechanics of language use and the linguistic structures that operate in society (Burr, 2015). In discourse analysis, Gee (2014) correspondingly refers to discourse (micro) and to Discourse (macro) to differentiate between the focus of the analysis. If these foci are considered to take polar positions on a continuum of discourse analysis, a number of formal approaches are sited between them according to the aims of the analysis (Table 15):


Micro			Macro	
				
Conversation Analysis	Ethnography of Communication	Discursive Psychology	Critical Discourse Analysis	Foucauldian Discourse Analysis
Examines patterns in the structure and organisation of language above the simple sentence.	Aims to identify 'speech events' in a community or culture and to consider the socio-cultural significance of speaking in a particular way.	Explores how interpersonal objectives are achieved through the use of 'discursive resources' in social interactions.	Examines how phenomena are constructed through performative acts of language i.e. speaking and writing to expose issues of power.	Focuses on how identities, subjects and objects are continually restructured and redefined through discourse to examine power in society and how this is supported by 'regimes of truth'.

Table 15: The Focus of Micro and Macro Methods of Discourse Analysis summarised from Pomerantz (2008)

Discourse analysis was considered appropriate for the purposes of this study due to the focus on the construction of the phenomenon of ESNA by individuals rather than their experience of it. The analysis performed therefore sits around the midpoint of the micro-macro continuum, as the research is concerned with the constructs of the participant groups that are examined through discourse. This is consistent with an approach to discourse analysis in which, 'The analyst looks for patterns of language associated with a particular topic or activity, such as the family of special terms and meanings around it,' (Wetherall, Taylor and Yates, 2007, p. 7) In addition, issues of marginalisation and oppression related to the pathologisation of the individual in the dominant medical discourse of ESNA, are recognised in this approach to analysis of the data.

3.4 Research Methods

3.4.1 Data Collection Method

Whilst some approaches to discourse analysis, for example conversation analysis, require 'naturally occurring' talk, such that the focus is on content and interaction (Wetherall, Taylor and Yates, 2001), for the purposes of this study, the analysis was only concerned with the content of the discourse. It was necessary therefore, to generate dialogue specifically concerned with the reasons for ESNA. Interviews were considered appropriate such that the discussion with the participant was initiated with the overt intent of gathering information (Thomas, 2017).

It is recognised however, that the use of interviews in discourse analysis can be subject to criticism such that, '... the researcher incorrectly assumes that the talk is about the official topic of the interview, imposing his or her own interpretation on the talk.' (Wetherall, Taylor and Yates, 2001, p. 28). To minimise this imposition, the interviews were unstructured asking relatively open-ended questions of the participants (Given, 2008). As an inductive method of data collection, the unstructured interview allowed the participant the opportunity to determine the important issues within the subject area without the use of pre-determined questions (Thomas, 2017), and enabled the interviewee responses to guide the interview (Robson, 2011). This is consistent with the endeavour to minimise the imposition of the researchers constructs of ESNA on the research.

During the interview, a number of tools were used to facilitate the participants' in talking about the reasons for ESNA (Appendices 5-7). These were employed using a graduated approach, depending on the participant group (Table 16). Although it is suggested that using different approaches with children can diminish their position as

active agents in the research (Kirk, 2007), in this study the rationale for this was the consideration of the vulnerability of the participant groups, in relation to the prospective emotional connection and investment with the subject of ESNA. It was considered therefore, that the graduated methods employed met the ethical requirement to be 'fit for purpose,' for conducting the research with the respective participant groups (British Education Research Association, 2011, p. 9). This was further ensured through the piloting of the timeline and the Grid Elaboration Method with a secondary age pupil to assess the effectiveness of these tools at facilitating dialogue (Joffe and Elsey, 2014). Information and consent forms for the pilot are included in Appendices 2-4.

Following the pilot, it was felt that an introductory activity would be beneficial to develop a relationship with the pupil. The importance of developing rapport with participants is recognised as an important factor in conducting interpersonal interviews (Kirk, 2007; Thomas, 2017). Equally, Thomas (2017) acknowledges that this can be more problematic with children, which Kirk (2007) attributes to the power differential between adults and children in society due to children being positioned as vulnerable. To facilitate the interviewer-interviewee relationship therefore, an 'All about Me' pro forma was initially completed with the young person (Appendix 5) to provide an opportunity to develop such rapport between the participant and the researcher through the sharing of factual information.

Both the pupil and parent completed a timeline of the young person's school history to offer a paced introduction to the discussion of reasons for attendance difficulties (Appendix 6); the participants engaged with this either as a verbal prompt or as a record of events at their choosing. The Grid Elaboration Method (GEM) was used with all participants, in which they were asked to write a word or draw something that they

associated with the reasons for ESNA (Appendix 7). The participants were then invited to expand on each to develop a dialogue around the reasons for ESNA. As the interviewer, I offered reflective comments, summative statements and open ended questions to expand the response. This was led by the focus of the interviewee, thus allowing the participants to, ‘...be the ones determining the important issues to be covered,’ (Thomas, 2017, p. 205).

Participant Group	Data Collection Tool		
	All About Me	School Timeline	Grid Elaboration
Pupils	✓	✓	✓
Parents		✓	✓
Staff			✓

Table 16: Graduated use of Data Collection Tools

It should be noted that the GEM was employed purely as a facilitative tool in the interview process in the pursuit of minimising the conscious and subconscious imposition of the interviewer’s constructs and to optimise the potential of the unstructured interview to elicit the constructs of the participant. Whilst the GEM provides, ‘A method for tapping naturalistic thoughts and feelings that people hold in relation to a particular issue,’ (Joffe and Elsey, 2014, p. 177), in psychoanalytic terms, it is assumed that these thoughts and feelings are driven by an emotionally charged sub-conscious process that becomes conscious through the process of free association (Joffe and Elsey, 2014) and is revealed through language (Moscovici and Vignaux, 2000). This assumption is contradictory therefore to the premise that knowledge is socially constructed through discourse and so is incompatible with the philosophical position of this research.

3.4.2 Participants Recruitment procedure

In consideration of the time restriction and scale of this study and due to the focus on the specific issue of ESNA, non-probability purposive sampling was employed as an appropriate method to identify participants. Participants were selected in line with the characteristics specified in the inclusion criteria (Table 17), and the aims of the study (Teddle and Yu, 2007; Cohen et al 2011).

Potential pupil participants who met the inclusion criteria were identified through discussion with local authority EPs and parent support service and via direct contact with a city school. Following a positive response from the parent, conveyed to the link professional and after permission was gained from the respective service to share their contact details for this purpose, I contacted the parent participant directly via email or phone. Two staff participants were at corresponding schools where pupil participants were on roll and one was from another secondary school in the city as it was not possible to engage an appropriate staff member from the corresponding secondary school. All staff participants held the position of Inclusion Manager as part of their role at the respective settings. The staff participants were contacted directly by myself.

A total of ten participants were interviewed (Figure 10). Initially, it was intended that three participants would comprise each group, however four parent participants were involved. This anomaly resulted due to it not being possible to interview the child of one of the parents from whom data had been collected. It was considered appropriate to include the data from this participant however, to contribute to the overall data set of this group.

	Inclusion Criteria	Rationale
Pupils	Aged between 11 and 16	The presenting pupil population experiencing ESNA in the researcher's educational psychology service (EPS) was predominantly of secondary school age for whom the outcomes of this research would inform provision. The method of data collection necessitated that pupils were able to engage in conversation and reflect on their experience; it was considered then that this method was more appropriate for older children.
	On roll or previously on roll at a mainstream secondary school within the city of the researcher's educational psychology service.	The pupil had accessed mainstream secondary education and so had the necessary experience to reflect on. The outcomes of the research were to be used to inform the provision in the city of the researcher's EPS so it was appropriate that the constructions of the reasons for ESNA were those of pupils who experienced this phenomena in the city's schools.
	Absent from school for a minimum of 10 weeks (approximately one term) excluding holiday periods and to be continuing to non-attend at the time of the interview.	An average of the school weeks available was taken to arrive at the 10 week figure that was deemed to constitute ESNA in relation to the data available concerning the city's ESNAs. It was considered that the reflection necessary in the interview process could be potentially re-traumatising for a pupil who had successfully reintegrated into school.
	Has current involvement from CAMHS.	Whilst the participants had the option of contacting the researcher to discuss any issues arising from their participation, current involvement ensured that the young person was receiving support for their emotional well-being and mental health post interview.
Parent	The parent/carer of a pupil who meets the above inclusion criteria.	Being the parent of a pupil with attendance difficulties meant it was likely that the participant had considered the reasons.
Staff	Responsibility held for inclusion in a mainstream secondary school within the city of the researcher's educational psychology service.	Responsibility for inclusion would necessitate that this member of staff had involvement with the pupil population of ESNAs and therefore were more likely to have considered the reasons for attendance difficulties.

Table 17: Inclusion criteria

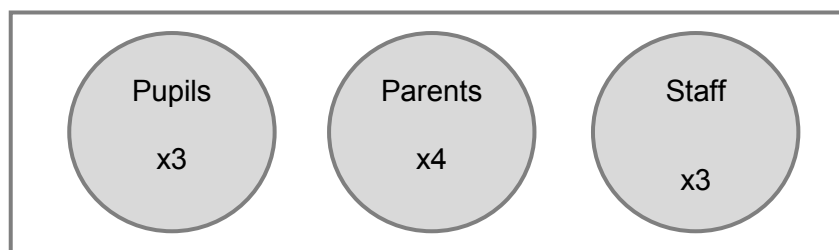


Fig 10: The Configuration of Participants

3.4.3 Participant Demographics

The demographics of the participants are detailed in Table 18. All of the pupil participants had current involvement from CAMHS and a diagnosis of depression and/or anxiety; two of the pupils were on medication for these conditions. One pupil also had a diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder. The pupils were currently on or had been on roll prior to the period of ESNA at three different secondary schools in the city where the study was conducted.

	Gender	Ethnicity	Age
Pupil 1	Male	White British	15
Pupil 2	Female	White British	16
Pupil 3	Female	White British	16
Parent 1	Female	White British	
Parent 2	Female	White British	
Parent 3	Female	White British	
Parent 4	Female	White British	
Staff 1	Female	White British	
Staff 2	Female	White British	
Staff 3	Female	White British	

Table 18: Demographic of Participants

3.4.4 Data Collection

All of the staff interviews were conducted individually in the respective school settings. The parent and pupil interviews took place in the family home of the participants. Two of the pupils opted to have their parent present during the interview and one parent asked the pupil to remain in the room while she completed the interview process. All parts of the interview were recorded with the informed consent or assent of the respective participant groups.

3.4.5 Data Analysis

For the purposes of this study, a phased approach to the analysis of the data was developed (Table 19), which allowed examination of the discourses of ESNA beyond the summative sentence level of language (Antaki et al, 2003). Following the transcription of the material verbatim (Phase 1: Appendix 8), an iterative process of analysis was engaged in, which necessitated repeatedly returning to the interview data (Phase 2). This therefore, was an inductive process of looking for patterns in the discourse, the significance of which was not known at this point (Wetherall, Taylor and Yates, 2001). Following the recommendation of Potter and Wetherall (1987), an initial 'broad coding' of the data was conducted as categories of discourses emerged (Phase 3). Illustrative quotations from the data were then arranged in a table aligned with these broad codes (Phase 4: Appendix 9). These quotations however, were not singularly allied to one category, such was the overlap of codes in the participant data; indeed the assumption of overlapping categories is noted to be a distinguishing feature of discourse analysis from other analytical approaches (Wetherall, Taylor and Yates, 2001).

Furthermore, whilst the initial phases of the approach detailed in Table 19 hold some similarities to other approaches to analysis, it is that discourse analysis is concerned with the role of language in actively constructing knowledge and realities that is the principle distinction, which is consequent of the theoretical position of the research (Wetherall, Taylor and Yates, 2001).

The pupil data was analysed in the first instance, followed by the staff data and finally the parent information. The sequence of analysis was intentional in separating the parent and pupil data sets as these focused on the same case of ESNA; the aim therefore was to minimise the potential for a subconscious focus on supporting discourses between the parent and the corresponding pupil participant.

Discourse Analysis Procedure	
Phase 1	The interview data was transcribed verbatim.
Phase 2	Each transcribed interview was read whilst listening to the recording of the corresponding interview; initial discourses pertaining to ESNA were noted.
Phase 3	Phase 1 was repeated with emerging discourses being highlighted in the transcribed data.
Phase 4	Extracts from the transcription were copied into a table to reflect the discourses that had been elicited from the data.
Phase 5	The discourses and corresponding quotations were reviewed to further distil the data and to ensure that those relating to the reasons for ESNA were drawn from the data.
Phase 6	A visual representation of the discourses was developed for each participant.
Phase 7	The visual representations resulting from phase 6 were amalgamated to form a visual representation of the reasons for ESNA for each participant group's data set (Figures. 11, 12 and 15).
Phase 8	The discourses were subjected to a process of comparative scrutiny to elicit common and contrasting dominant discourses within and between the participant groups.
Phase 9	The dominant discourses were examined and discussed in relation to each participant group and the relevant literature.

Table 19: Phases of Discourse Analysis

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research was underpinned by the imperative ethical responsibility to avoid doing harm (British Psychological Society, 2009) and conducted in accordance with the University of Birmingham Code of Conduct for Research and the ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2009) and the British Education Research Association (BERA, 2011).

3.5.1 Informed Consent

Informed consent may be defined as, 'The procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in an investigation after being informed of the facts that would be likely to influence their decisions (Diener and Crandall, 1978 cited in Cohen, 2011: 78); this therefore necessitates competence, voluntarism, and full comprehension of the information (Cohen, 2011). These elements are reflected in the positioning of informed consent as a conditional prerequisite of research: 'The Association takes voluntary informed consent to be the condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway,' BERA, 2011, p. 5).

Full comprehension of consent, also termed informed appreciation (Dewing, 2007), was pursued through the sharing of bespoke information sheets for each of the participating groups via email following a positive expression of interest; the information sheet for the pupils was sent to the parent participants (Appendices 10-12). This communication detailed the focus and purpose of the study, what would be involved should they agree to participate, what would happen to the information and the boundaries of keeping the information confidential. This ensured that, 'Clients [participants], particularly children and vulnerable adults, are [were] given ample

opportunity to understand the nature, purpose, and anticipated consequences of any professional services or research participation, so that they may give informed consent,' (BPS, 2009, p. 12).

Follow-up contact was made with parents, to arrange a meeting on behalf of themselves and the pupil, and with staff via phone or email. At this meeting the information sheets were again shared to ensure that all participants had had access to this information. At this time informed consent was sought from staff and parents (Appendices 13 and 14). Consent on behalf of the child was also sought from the parent due to the age of the participant (BERA, 2011). The voluntary nature of their involvement and right to withdraw from the research was made explicit to support the participant's self-determination (BPS, 2009).

Whilst consent had been given on behalf of the pupil, informed assent was sought from the pupil directly. This was presented as a number of statements concerning the issues outlined above, which they confirmed that they both understood and agreed to (Appendix 15). Although there is no legal age denoted for when a child may give consent on their own behalf (Kirk, 2007), attaining informed assent for participation was an inherent element of the consent process in accordance with the positioning of the rights of children and young people to have a voice in issues that impact on them (UN, 1987; DFE, 2015).

3.5.2 Confidentiality

The issue of confidentiality was addressed through the information sheets and during the process of consent to ensure that all participants understood how the information would be used and who it would be reported to (BPS, 2009). Participants were also made aware in writing of the limitations of maintaining confidentiality (BPS, 2009) and

this was then reiterated verbally at the interview. The specific circumstances in which confidentiality would be broken was included in the initial information and the consent forms. No names of participants were attached to any audio transcribed interview data. Information regarding this was included on the information sheet and discussed at the time of the interview.

3.5.3 Voluntarism and the Right to Withdraw

Several measures were taken to ensure the voluntarism of participation and avoid coercion of participation (BPS, 2009; BERA, 2011). Primarily, the voluntary nature of participation was conveyed to potential participants through the information sheets for pupils, parents and staff in the choice given to engage in the research. This was subsequently made explicit in the consent and assent process both verbally and in writing. No monetary or material incentive was ascribed to participation.

The right to withdraw from research is an unequivocal component of the BPS (2011) ethical standard regarding the participant's self-determination; this specifies the researcher's responsibility to, 'Ensure from the first contact that clients are aware of their right to withdraw at any time from the receipt of professional services or from research participation,' (p. 14) and that following the communication of intention to withdraw that all data and information regarding the participant will be destroyed. Staff and parents were therefore informed in writing and the pupil verbally of their right to withdraw from the research for a period of up to 2 weeks from the date of the interview and told of the disposal of the data should they choose to terminate their involvement.

3.5.4 Safety and Well-being

This research adhered to the overarching ethical principle to not cause harm to participants (BPS, 2009; BERA, 2011). It is also made explicit that children's well-being

should be a priority in accordance with Article 3 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (BERA, 2011).

This was pursued through engaging in reflexive practice to, ‘...consider all research from the standpoint of research participants, for the purpose of eliminating potential risks to psychological well-being, physical health, personal values, or dignity,’ (BPS, 2009, p. 19). Furthermore, the measures outlined concerning informed consent and assent, the graduated interview process for participant groups and the rationale for external agency support for pupils sought to safeguard this ethical imperative. Following the interview, the possible need for further support for one of the parents was evident; this was discussed with the participant and action taken to provide this with their permission.

Consideration was also given to my safety as the researcher in accordance with the guidelines that, ‘Psychologists have a responsibility to be mindful of any potential risks to themselves’ (BPS, 2009, p. 18). In terms of physical safety, the EPS policy regarding home visits was followed. In addition, both during the interview phase and the analysis of the data, I was mindful of the potential emotional impact of the information shared regarding the pupils’ experiences and the impact of this on their emotional and physical health. University supervision was sought as required therefore to support my emotional well-being during the research.

3.5.5 Motivation for the research

To facilitate ethical transparency, motivating factors for the research and the purposes of the study should be made explicit, (Thomas, 2017). In terms of outcomes for the research, the predominant motivations for this piece of research therefore, may be summarised as follows:

- To include the voice of the child in our understanding of ESNA
- To develop an informed understanding of how the reasons for ESNA are constructed by the participant groups
- To utilise the outcomes of the research to inform practice and provision in the local authority and the practice of professional, including EPs.

It should be noted however, that the research was conducted in part fulfilment of the requirements of the doctoral training course for educational psychologists and was not therefore undertaken for purely non-altruistic reasons.

3.6 Chapter Summary

The philosophical orientation of this research is thus positioned within a relativist ontology; the aligned social constructionist epistemology considers the concurrent multiple realities of the participants and therefore the exploration of the construction of the reasons for ESNA of the participant groups. The discourses of the pupils, parents and staff were analysed through engaging in a process of discourse analysis; the results of this analysis will be discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion of the Pupil Participant Group

4.1 Introduction

The discussion and findings will be presented over the following two chapters, in the endeavor of answering the research questions of this study. A visual representation of the discourses for each participant group is included to exemplify how the discourses are constructed by the participants (constructs common to all participants are shown in blue). Each of the over-arching discourses and aligned constructs are discussed in turn. The relevant literature is drawn upon to explore how the results of this study sit within current theory regarding the construction of ENSA.

Illustrative quotations from the transcribed interviews are submitted as examples of the constructs, during the discussion of findings. Direct extracts are shown in italics; these quotations are verbatim and as such grammatical and syntax errors directly reflect what was said in the interview. The participants are differentiated from one another through the allocation of an arbitrary letter; this does not correspond to their name in any way or to the table of participants included in the previous chapter. All reference to the individual and their contextual setting have been omitted to further protect anonymity.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the discourses of the pupil participant group and explore these in relation to research question 1: How do young people, parents/carers and educators construct the reasons for extended school non-attendance?

4.2 Pupil Constructions of the Reasons for ESNA

The pupils' construction of the reasons for ESNA are represented in Figure 11. The constructions of this participant group are aligned with four overarching discourses:

- Negative School Experience
- Mental Health
- Lack of Understanding
- Support and Provision

4.2.1 Negative School Experiences

All pupil participants construct negative experiences at school as a reason for their ESNA. These reasons are further constructed in relation to three specific areas of experience:

- Friendships and Peer Relationships
- Academic Experience
- Transition to Secondary School

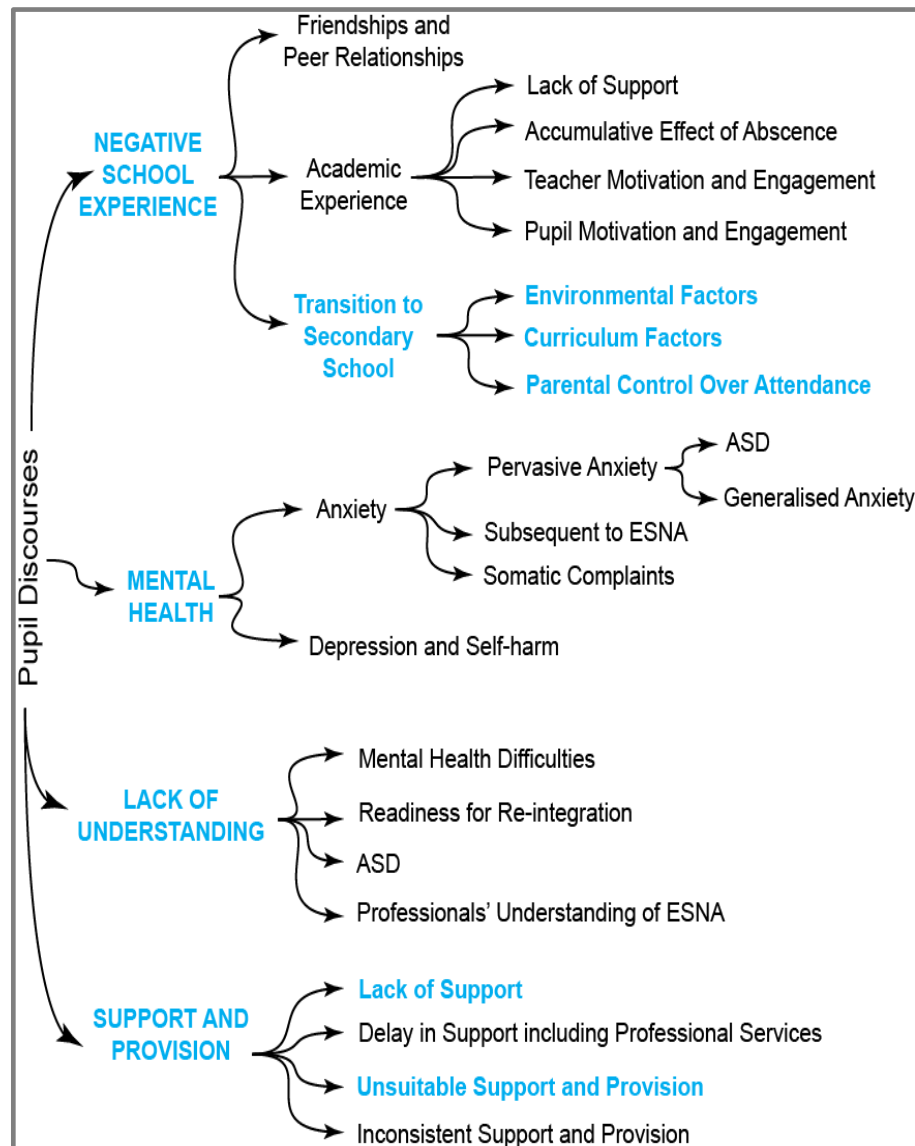


Fig. 11: Pupil Discourses of ESNA

It is interesting to note that two of the pupils referred to negative experiences in their early school career. Whilst it is possible that this was a contributory factor to their ESNA, it is not feasible to ascertain a causal relationship; in Pupil B's discourse however, it is explicit that primary school experience is not constructed as such a contributing factor:

B	<i>It was easy through primary school... It wouldn't stem from like because I didn't want to be there because I loved primary school...it was where I peaked.</i>
---	---

4.2.1.1 Friendship and Peer Relationships

Two of the pupils referred to bullying at school in their discourses, whilst one participant did not include peer relationships. It should be noted that the bullying behaviour was not limited to interpersonal school bullying, such that both pupils included online ‘cyber’ bullying in their discourses.

The pupil discourses did not construct bullying as a singular reason for their non-attendance, but rather this was a contributory factor and is thus consistent with bullying being constructed as, ‘...the most common factor to contribute to SR [school refusal],’ (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008, p. 35). As a contributory factor however, bullying behaviour interplays with other stressors in the pupils’ systems. This may be framed in terms of the dynamic model of ESNA (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008) where the stressor of bullying, in conjunction with problems within the family, exceeded the pupil’s support and resilience. The discourses concerned with bullying also construct this experience as a precipitating factor of ESNA in being the additional stressor that prevented school attendance, thus resulting in the ‘push’ factors outweighing the ‘pull’ factors of school attendance:

A	<i>I could cope with it like before the half term but then after the events that happened in half term there was like family problems at home and then I didn't enjoy school because of those two people and then I just couldn't really cope with it</i>
---	---

This is similarly apparent in the discourse of Pupil C, which included more general difficulties with friendships and peer relationships. This participant has a diagnosis of an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), the diagnostic criteria of which includes the impairment of social interaction and communication (DSM V, 2015). Such difficulties

are constructed as a contributory factor to the pupil's ESNA, consistent with the findings of Munkhaugen et al (2017). It is reasonable to assume therefore, that the impairment of social interaction may be a source of stress for Pupil C and as such may be considered to be a 'push' factor to stay away from school. This could also be framed in terms of the function of the non-attendance (Kearney and Silverman 1996), in that avoidance of the school setting is a means of managing this difficulty; this in isolation however is too simplistic, given the range of factors constructed as contributory to the pupil's ESNA.

4.2.1.2 Academic Experience

Two of the pupils constructed their experience of lessons and teachers as a contributory factor. Of these, one pupil referred to the pressure brought by the expectations of formal examinations and another to the difficulties in understanding the work; academic experience was further constructed as a contributory factor in relation to special educational needs (SEND) and the accumulative effect of the experience of not having needs met, in relation to academic expectations.

4.2.1.2.1 Lack of Academic Support

The difficulty regarding academic work was exacerbated by the pupils' sense of lack of understanding of prolonged absence and support from teachers, in relation to their needs, and is thus connected to the pupil discourse concerned with the lack of understanding of others. Pupil C specifically constructed this in terms of fear in approaching teachers to seek support in regards to academic work, which may be attributable to the social interaction and communication difficulties, which are characteristic of ASD.

In consideration of ESNA and SEND in a wider sense, whilst reference is made to the possibility of learning difficulties impacting on attendance (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008), it is equally noted that the 'typical' ESNA pupil is of at least average intelligence (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008; Goodman and Scott, 2012). Although it is reasonable to consider that difficulties in learning may impact on attendance, no sound evidence base is presented for such claims. Moreover, in light of the difficulties in nomenclature and the heterogeneity of the ESNA population, the identification of a 'typical' pupil profile is not a viable proposition in regards to SEND, just as with other pupil characteristics of this group.

Government statistics (DFE, 2018) regarding absence include pupils with SEND as a distinct category (Appendix 1), where SEND is equated with those pupils who have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) and the two terms are used interchangeably to refer to a single group. This is not the case however, as not all pupils with SEND meet the criteria for a statutory assessment of their needs. Whilst it is interesting to note that there is an increase in absence amongst the SEND population in government statistics, which may in part be attributable to the inclusion of pupils with physical and medical difficulties, the inconsistency in terminology renders these statistics unfit for purpose. Furthermore, whilst pupils who are experiencing ESNA may be included in this numerical picture, they are not identified as a distinct group and thus no statistical profile regarding the incidence of SEND amongst this population is available.

4.2.1.2.2 Accumulative Effect of Absence on Academic Experience

Pupil B also included lack of support for academic needs in their discourse in relation to the accumulative effect of being absent from school. This is illustrative of the 'Vicious

Cycle of School Refusal' (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008) and is consistent with the findings of Archer, Filmer-Sankey and Fletcher-Campbell, (2003):

B	<i>...when I would start like missing like one day or like two days then it would be the whole week and then I would be so far behind that like it would be pointless for me to be sitting in a classroom anyway because I feel stupid... I think that was kind of the part of me where I said there was no point in me learning this and I am already so far behind like there is no point to this.</i>
---	--

4.2.1.2.3 Teacher Motivation and Engagement

Pupil B commented on the role of teachers in the school system as a contributory factor to ESNA. This was related to the perceived motivation of teachers and how this impacted upon the pupil's engagement in learning. Whilst teaching staff are constructed in the literature as a contributory factor to ESNA (Lauchlan, 2003), generally there is a lack of reported research concerning the role of teachers in regard to non-attendance in the available literature (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008); teachers would however, appear to be relevant in consideration of the discourse of this participant.

4.2.1.2.4 Pupil Motivation and Engagement

Pupil B constructed a lack of motivation to learn as a significant contributory factor to their non-attendance, and specifically a perceived lack of transparency regarding the relevance of the curriculum and the application of skills in future life. This is related to the discourse of transition in terms of the pupil's comparative experience of learning at primary school and is resonant of the lack of connectedness brought by a '...poorly tailored academic curricula and student boredom,' (Kearney, 2008, p.262):

B	<i>Yeah not knowing the point of something you just think all this is meaningless so what is the point of me learning it because I am not going to ever use it...I always enjoy learning if I know I am going to use it.</i>
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4.2.1.3 Transition to Secondary School

Whilst all of the pupils constructed the transition to secondary school as a contributory factor for ESNA, the specifics of these discourses are individualised; the pupils construct the onset of ESNA as a rapid occurrence, following the culmination of contributory factors, or as a gradual process subsequent to transition:

A	<i>I still think I felt I could go in but in, after the October half term on the Monday back at school, like I just woke up and I felt like it was impossible to get out of bed and showered and dressed to get into school.</i>
B	<i>So, I think Year 8 is where I start going downhill and then like gradually I just kept taking off more and more time off until eventually I didn't even want to go in anymore.</i>
C	<i>In year 7 at first it was not too bad but then it got worse and worse each year. It got worse and worse to the point I couldn't cope.</i>

4.2.1.3.1 Environmental Factors

The environmental difference of the secondary setting to that of primary school, in relation to the size of the setting and the experience of moving between lessons, was included in the discourse of two pupils. These environmental factors however, are not constructed in isolation and are aligned in the pupil discourses with other contributory factors, relating to physical appearance and ASD respectively. Whilst this is consistent with research that has constructed fear of the school environment as a significant factor (Archer, Filmer-Sankey and Fletcher-Campbell, 2003; Goodman and Scott, 2012), this should again be considered in terms of the very limited evidence base regarding the specific role of school related factors (Thambirajah, Grandison and D-Hayes, 2008, Havik, Bru and Ertesvåg, 2015).

One pupil included the noise level, in relation to the number of pupils, and the social interaction with others in their construction of the difficulties that are brought by the

environment of secondary school. This pupil has a diagnosis of ASD, which is recognised as a contributory child factor (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes; Munkhaugen et al, 2017), of which sensory processing difficulties are frequently a comorbid characteristic (Baranek et al 2006; Leekam et al 2007; Tomchek and Dunn 2007). Sensory processing issues may therefore be constructed as both a predisposing contributory factor for pupils with such a diagnosis, as well as a precipitating factor in this instance.

4.2.1.3.2 Curriculum Factors

For one of the pupil participants, the contributory factors constructed in relation to transition were concerned with the approach to learning in secondary school and the relevance of the curriculum, and is thus related to the discourse of academic experience. This may be indicative of the 'cross-phase dip' that can occur following transition (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008). Such lack of motivation however, is also characteristic of a depressive episode; as this participant was experiencing low mood, directional causality cannot be assumed from the participant's discourse. Lack of motivation however, is constructed as a reason for ESNA by this pupil.

4.2.1.3.3 Parental Control over Pupil Attendance

The change in the parental role of taking the child to school, due to the increased independence following the move to a secondary setting, is constructed as a contributory factor to the pupils' attendance difficulties. This is consistent with the proposition of Goodman and Scott (2012) regarding the reduced capacity for parents to enforce attendance of older pupils. It should be considered therefore, that the pupils' autonomy in relation to school attendance and the reduction in parental control, may

contribute to the rise in ESNA at the time of transition to secondary school (Pellegrini, 2007; Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008; Goodman and Scott, 2012; Nutall and Woods, 2013):

A	<i>I think because of my age, Mum could always just dragged me in and I couldn't really put up much of a fight but now I think if I just say I am staying in bed, I am not going she can't really pick me up so.</i>
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4.2.2 Mental Health

All pupil discourses constructed difficulties regarding mental health issues in relation to their non-attendance; this was further constructed as:

- Anxiety
- Depression and Self-harm
- Perception and Understanding

4.2.2.1 Anxiety

Whilst anxiety is included in the discourses of all of the pupils, the degree to which this is constructed as a precipitating factor, as opposed to a perpetuating factor as a result of the ESNA, varied between participants.

4.2.2.1.1 Pervasive Anxiety

As previously discussed, in relation to the construct of negative school experience, the non-attendance of Pupil A was constructed as being precipitated by events out of school, which caused elevated anxiety and thus reduced the pupil's capacity to cope with additional stressors. Equally however, this pupil reported having always felt anxious and so here anxiety may be constructed as a predisposing factor to ESNA. Indeed, the construction of this pupil's anxiety is a complex amalgamation of factors resulting from the interplay of the different systems around the pupil. This is consistent with the reciprocal interaction and influence of the developmental systems depicted in

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological System Model in the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and is aligned with the literature that constructs the reasons for ESNA as multi-factorial and resulting from an inter-systemic difficulty (Figure 6: Kearney, 2008):

A	<i>I could cope with it like before the half-term but then after the events that happened in half-term there was like family problems at home and then I didn't enjoy school because of those two people and then I just couldn't really cope with it.</i>
---	--

4.2.2.1.1.1 Anxiety and ASD

Pupil C constructed anxiety as a pervasive difficulty that is continually present due to ASD; this discourse provides an insight into how this affect is constructed by the pupil in comparison to a 'neuro-typical' individual and is indicative of generalised anxiety:

C	<i>You're neuro-typical. So yours [anxiety] might be there, mine would be there. And then when you are normal it will be a bit lower, mine would be a bit lower but it would still be pretty high. But then when I get even anxious it is way up high where as yours is just there. I have anxiety all the time...like every second of every day.</i>
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4.2.2.1.1.2 Accumulative Effect of ESNA

Anxiety is also constructed as becoming a generalised difficulty, as a result of the accumulative effect of ESNA, by Pupils A and B. This is illustrative of the way in which social anxiety can result when the anxious affect becomes entrenched for pupils and of how difficulties become self-perpetuating. This is also consistent with the cycle of ESNA and resultant concomitant difficulties (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008) and with the findings of Archer, Filmer-Sankey and Fletcher-Campbell (2003) regarding the incremental difficulty in returning to school:

4.2.2.1.2 Anxiety Subsequent to ESNA

Anxiety is further constructed by Pupil B as being a result of ESNA and as a consequence of depression, rather than an initial cause of the absence. This is illustrative of how different factors, from those that precipitated the attendance difficulty, may be responsible for perpetuating ESNA and therefore of how a cycle of non-attendance may become established (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008):

B	<i>... because I was so depressed it would give me anxiety because I would be missing all this work. It is a horrible mix of the two because anxiety as well like you worry about everything but depression is where you are so done with everything and you have got no energy.</i>
---	--

4.2.2.1.3 Somatic Complaints

Pupil A is the only participant to include anxiety related somatic complaints in their construction of attendance difficulties despite these being identified as a characteristic of clinical presentations (Freemont, 2003).

4.2.2.2 Depression and Self harm

Depression was included in the discourse of two of the pupils, which is consistent with Egger, Costello and Angold (2003), such that this is identified as comorbid with ESNA. Pupil B named depression as a contributory factor, which reflects the multi-factorial nature of ESNA (Lauchlan, 2003). Depression also featured as a construct in the discourse in relation to the negative interplay of depression and anxiety previously discussed.

The onset of depression is further constructed by this pupil as related to the discourse of feeling a lack of understanding from others. This is illustrative of factors in the school system that perpetuate the attendance difficulty. The discourse of Pupil C reflects the

severity of their depression in their experience of suicidal ideations, the impact on sleep and the regular episodes of self-harm:

C	<i>Year 9 was the worst because that was when I was really, really suicidal. Like I would rather die than go to school. I was that bad. I wouldn't sleep at night or be up until like 5am worrying about going to school. I cut myself like every night and everything because I was that low and that. I just couldn't cope.</i>
---	---

4.2.3 Lack of Understanding

All of the pupil participants constructed the lack of understanding of others as a contributory factor of ESNA. This discourse is then further constructed as:

- Mental Health Difficulties
- Readiness for Reintegration
- ASD
- Professionals

4.2.3.1 Mental Health Difficulties

Pupils A and B constructed this discourse around a lack of understanding of the impact of mental health difficulties. Pupil A referred to the perception of such difficulties as a 'weakness', which can lead to bullying by other students, and Pupil B suggested that depression as opposed to a physical or visible illness can lead to being treated like a 'freak'. With regards to staff, this may reflect the inadequate training in schools concerning issues surrounding attendance difficulties and related mental health needs (Archer, Filmer-Sankey and Fletcher-Campbell, 2003).

The prospect of having to explain the absence to others is constructed as a perpetuating factor of non-attendance, which further reflects the discourse of lack of understanding and the perceived validity of the difficulties. Whilst it should be

considered that this construct may be due to the pupils' perception of the response of others when they return to school, rather than their actual experience, Pupil A constructed this in accordance with their experience of what has happened to other students:

A	<i>Like it is hard to get back in because I know I will face a lot of questions about why I have been away but I don't want to say it is a mental health issues because I feel like I will get picked on as a weakness and as I know I will because I have seen people with mental health issues get picked on and bullied because of their mental health illness.</i>
---	--

It is interesting to note that discourses concerned with the validation of mental health difficulties and concern regarding the understanding of others, is seemingly opposed to the current political and educational profile of mental health, reflected in the initiatives that have been introduced in recent years, such as Time to Talk. Here mental health difficulties are constructed as an issue that is not openly discussed or accepted. Pupil B further constructed mental health as an area of need that was not discussed and in relation to which she felt treated abnormally, further reflecting a lack of understanding in others.

4.2.3.2 Readiness for Reintegration

Pupil A constructed a lack of understanding as a perpetuating factor of their attendance difficulty due to the staff taking on an 'expert role' regarding the pupil's readiness to return. This has implications for the pupil's self-efficacy and personal autonomy regarding their reintegration into school:

A	<i>I did want to go in he and I felt ready but I was prevented from going into the lessons by the staff in the (...) because it was too soon but at that moment in time I felt ready and I wasn't let in and then I think that almost let me think oh I am not ready and doubt myself.</i>
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4.2.3.3 ASD

Pupil C constructed a lack of understanding in relation to the dyad of impairment of ASD (DSM-V, 2013). This is constructed as leading directly to episodes of absence as they would 'leave early'. This is further constructed as a contributory factor due to lack of understanding of the attendance difficulty, such that the pupil had to 'keep going to school':

C	<i>You just get misunderstood a lot when you have got Autistic because they don't properly understand it... And I just didn't feel understood by anyone to the point that I thought my Mum didn't understand me because I had to keep going to school.</i>
---	--

4.2.3.4 Legal Consequences of ESNA

Whilst not dominant in the pupil discourses, the legal discourse of school non-attendance is constructed by Pupil C as a contributory factor to their attendance difficulties and as one of the reasons why the parent continued to send the pupil to school, which in itself contributed to the feeling of lack of understanding. The lack of understanding in relation to the officials carrying out the procedural actions regarding non-attendance is included in the discourse of pupil A:

A	<i>...he [the attendance officer] came in straight away and 'oh he is not feeling great' because I was still upstairs because I was feeling nervous and he said in a loud voice 'I am going to have to call the police if I don't see him.'</i>
---	---

4.2.4. Support and Provision

All pupils constructed difficulties regarding support and provision as a reason for them becoming non-attending and as a maintaining factor of their ESNA. This is further constructed as:

- Lack of Support
- Delay in Support

- Unsuitable Support and Provision

4.2.4.1 Lack of Support

The pupil discourses constructed a lack of support at school as a precipitating and perpetuating factor of their ESNA. This should be of concern due to the apparent distress attributed to this by pupils and that this lack of support is constructed as a direct cause of further difficulties, such as depression. This is again consistent with the construction of the perpetuating factors of ESNA differing from the precipitatory cause (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008). Pupil B further constructed the lack of support as related to the construct of academic experience and a sense of not being cared about as an individual.

It is interesting to consider Pupil B's construction of the lack of support being due to their compliant behaviour, such that the pupil did not obviously '*act out*' their difficulties in the school environment until the non-attendance became problematic. This has implications for early intervention and the need to be aware of more subtle precipitatory indicators through changes in the pupil's presentation, including their engagement with learning:

B	<i>...they didn't pick up on anything that was wrong with me because it was like I was doing what I was told so if you are not acting out then they don't see it as a problem.</i>
---	--

4.2.4.2. Delay in Support

Two pupils constructed the delay experienced in attaining support in the school system as a reason for ESNA, with such a lack of support being constructed as a cause of the subsequent difficulties experienced by the pupil. This is contradictory to the reported 'early action' taken by all schools in regard to absence difficulties (Archer, Filmer-

Sankey and Fletcher-Campbell, 2003) and the need for prompt intervention in relation to a positive outcome for pupils (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008; Goodman and Scott, 2012; Nutall and Woods, 2013; Baker and Bishop 2015). Both pupils similarly constructed the delay in support from CAMHS as a contributory factor to their ESNA:

A	<i>Because back then it would have worked I think because I wasn't depressed or severely anxious but like that is what happened from not going into school.</i>
---	---

4.2.4.3 Unsuitable Support and Provision

Two of the pupil participants constructed unsuitable support and provision as a reason for their ESNA and it is reasonable to suggest that this is related to the lack of understanding of the needs of pupils experiencing attendance difficulties. For these pupils, this resulted in them being grouped with other students who are not attending lessons and whom have other difficulties, some of which are acted out through behaviour. This construct is also linked to the isolation brought by being separated from the classroom environment and peer group. This is constructed as a precipitatory and perpetuating factor such that the provision was not conducive to increasing attendance:

C	<i>C: I did start getting isolated because I couldn't cope in the classes and I was shoved into an office and it was really isolated and it didn't help me at all. It wasn't the right approach.</i>
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4.2.4.3.1 Unsuitable Strategies

While strategies used in schools are aimed at supporting pupils in their difficulties with anxiety, such initiatives are constructed as exacerbating the feelings of anxiety rather than alleviating such difficulties:

A	<i>They gave me like a work, someone to talk to if I was feeling like down or something, like a card to get out of lessons if I needed to go to the toilet and a pass if I was late but I am not really going to use a card that says "xxx can go to the toilet if he wants to" in the middle of the lesson and then have all the questions from everyone in the class like why have you got a card that says you can go to the toilet?... It just wasn't done in a very easy way.</i>
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Unsuitable support from outside agencies is further constructed as a contributory factor, such that this can be detrimental, rather than helpful, or inappropriate to the needs that the pupil feels that they have.

4.2.4.4 Inconsistent Support and Provision

The lack of suitable provision and the inconsistency regarding this is constructed as being a perpetuating factor in preventing pupils accessing lessons. It is reasonable to suggest that this is related to both lack of understanding and the specific lack of provision in the educational setting:

A	<i>I did want to go in and I felt ready but I was prevented from going into the lessons by the staff in the (...) because it was too soon but at that moment in time I felt ready and I wasn't let in and then I think that almost let me think oh I am not ready and doubt myself</i>
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4.3 Chapter Summary

This presentation of findings depicts the overarching discourses of:

- Negative School Experience
- Mental Health Difficulties
- Support and Provision

Whilst the pupils share overarching discourses, these have been explored to examine the individualised constructs of reasons for ESNA by this participant group, the diversity of which supports the heterogeneous nature of attendance difficulties. These findings will now be discussed in relation the findings of the parent and staff participant groups.

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion of the Parent and Staff Participant Groups

5.1 Introduction

During the course of this chapter, the discourses of the parents and staff will be discussed, in the context of the current literature, and comparisons drawn between these findings and those from the pupil participant group in order to address questions 1 and 2 concurrently. Question 3 will then be explored in light of the overall findings of this research. The research questions to be addressed are shown in Table 20:

<i>RQ1</i>	<i>How do young people, parent/carers and educators construct the reasons for extended school non-attendance?</i>
<i>RQ2</i>	<i>Is there a differential in the construction of the reasons for extended non-attendance between the participant groups?</i>
<i>RQ3</i>	<i>Is the term 'anxious non-attenders' consistent with the construction of the reasons for extended school non-attendance by the participant groups?</i>

Table 20: Research Questions

5.2 Parent Constructions of the Reasons for ESNA

In contrast to the dominant pupil discourses, which are aligned with four overarching themes, the discourse of the parent participants is dominated by the construct of anxiety. The construction of this contributory factor however, has notable similarities to the pupil discourses (Figure 12).

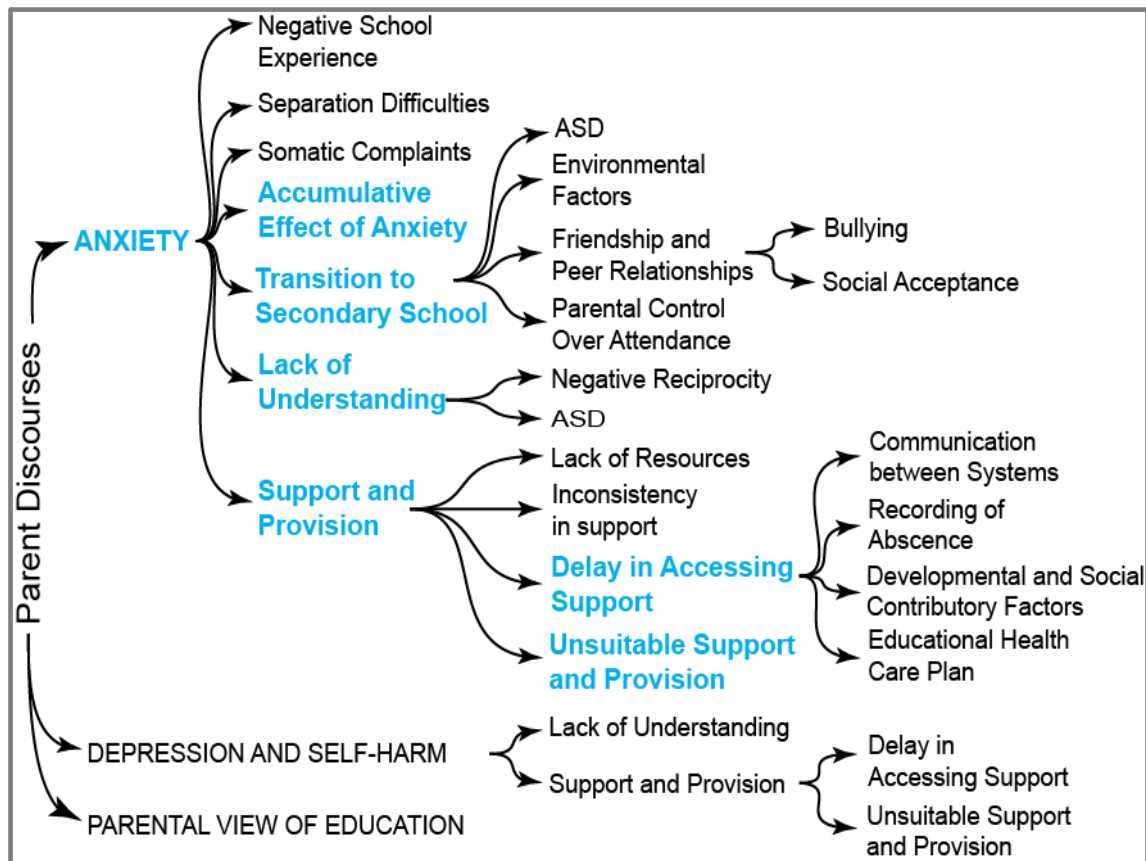


Fig. 12: Parent Discourses of ESNA

5.2.1 Corresponding Parent and Pupil Constructions

During the first part of this chapter, the discourses that are similar to those of the pupils will be discussed before examining those at variance to the pupil participant group.

5.2.1.1 Anxiety

Three of the parent participants constructed anxiety as the predominant precipitating factor to ESNA, which is then perpetuated by other contributory factors (Parents D, F and G). Parent E constructed this factor as secondary to the pupil's depression, although anxiety is constructed as a barrier to attendance:

D	<i>...sadly I think there is a lot of contributing factors to him not attending school and mainly that he has had anxiety.</i>
E	<i>I am less worried about the anxiety than the depression because I feel that is the defining factor in the whole of it... It is not just the anxiety, it is the depression.</i>
F	<i>That [anxiety] is her barrier... her levels of anxiety are always high. Always.</i>
G	<i>...for her it's been debilitating; her condition... her anxiety just paralyses her.</i>

Parent E reported a positive pre-secondary school experience for their child, whilst negative primary school experience is constructed by some parents as a predisposing contributory factor to ESNA; this has implications for identifying those pupils who are at risk of attendance difficulties, particularly at the point of transition to secondary school, such that this is a peak time for pupils experiencing ESNA and the point at which attendance became problematic for three of the pupil participants.

Parent G further constructed anxiety, as evident in the pupil's educational history, as an issue of separating from the mother. This is consistent with the construction of separation anxiety as a reason for attendance difficulties and in this being more prevalent amongst younger pupils who are experiencing ESNA (Elliot, 1999).

Whilst the overarching discourse of anxiety is shared with pupils, the construction of separation difficulties is not, thus illustrating the difference within discourses that share specific language. Furthermore, this construct is illustrative of the medicalised discourse of non-attendance being drawn upon by the parents in the use of the phrase '*attachment type issues*'. This with-in child construction is synonymous with the clinical discourse of attendance difficulties, which constructs anxiety as the cause of school non-attendance (Egger, Costello and Angold, 2003).

It should be recognised however, that such a presentation may equally be constructed as both systemic and multi-factorial, such that the attachment difficulty is attributed to the accumulative effect of the pupil experiencing recurrent loss of significant others. The contributory factors in this presentation therefore, may be considered in terms of the Bioecological Model of Development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), in the context of the family system where the loss has occurred, rather than this being assumed to be a within child difficulty. Indeed, several of the common family factors of 'school refusal' are evident in the systemic history of the family of Parent G, (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008: Table 21).

Family
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recent transitions e.g. divorce, relocation • Recent family loss • Changes in the family • Parental anxiety and/or other mental health difficulties • Lack of involvement of the father • Level of parental stress in relation to child's anxiety and SR • Parental over involvement or overprotection.

Table 21: Family Factors involved in School Refusal summarised from Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, (2008)

A systemic construction of ESNA may also be considered in regard to the onset of the attendance difficulty in terms of the dynamic model of non-attendance (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008). Parent F for example, constructed the accumulative experience of this affect resulting in increasing difficulties in attendance, and thus reflects a gradual onset of ESNA; if the pupil's anxiety is '*always high*', it is reasonable to suggest that other contributory factors increased the 'push' elements away from school, such that the pupil experienced a gradual onset of attendance difficulties.

Whilst anxiety is the dominant parental discourse therefore, ESNA may still be constructed as a multi-factorial difficulty. This will be explored through further examination of the parental discourses.

5.2.1.1.1 Somatic Complaints

Somatic presentations of anxiety are constructed as contributory factors to attendance difficulties by two parents. This is consistent with the somatic complaints cited by Blagg (1987) and detailed by Freemont (2003: Table 4), as well as the ‘...overt signs of anxiety or even panic,’ referred to by Hersov (1977: p. 58). The generalised experience of anxiety in relation to the somatic complaints experienced by pupils, was also constructed as a maintaining reason for ESNA, which further illustrates the perpetuating factors of attendance difficulties.

Parent E further constructed the physical reasons for non-attendance as being instigated by the pupil, such that this is constructed in the discourse as a conscious act in order to become unwell, which included not eating or drinking. This parent however, also constructed depression as a reason for attendance difficulties, the symptomatic classification of which includes significant impairment of functioning (DSM V, 2015) that may present as diminished motivation and altered appetite (NHS, 2018); thus caution should be taken in assuming conscious intent.

5.2.1.1.2 Accumulative Effect of Anxiety

The accumulative effect of anxiety in cases of ESNA was constructed as a perpetuating factor by parents and one that can lead to social withdrawal. This is further constructed in relation to the perception of ESNA and so is linked to the discourse of lack of understanding.

D	<i>... anxiety feeds itself so you know if you have one day off then you are more anxious about going in the next day. If you have two days off it sort of makes it even worse and the more days, the more you don't do something, the more you avoid something the worse the anxiety becomes surrounding that thing.</i>
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5.2.1.1.3 Transition to Secondary School

All parents constructed issues around transition to secondary school as a contributory factor, although the specific constructions are again individualised.

5.2.1.1.3.1 ASD and Environmental Factors

The discourse of Parent F is concerned with the experience of being overwhelmed that resulted from this transition, which is aligned with the sensory processing difficulties characteristic of a pupil with ASD:

F	<i>It [anxiety] was so much worse... it was just all the changes. She was just totally overwhelmed and confused every day what was going on... It's too big, it's too noisy and crowded. She used to get lost going around school</i>
---	---

5.2.1.1.3.2 Friendships and Peer Relationships

Whilst the transition to secondary school is also constructed as a contributory factor by Parent E, the discourse is concerned with the anxiety experienced in relation to feeling socially accepted by others, which subsequently leads to the pupil feeling *'frightened of school'*. Parent E also constructed the lack of friends with whom their child transitioned as a reason for difficulties in moving to the secondary setting; this may therefore, be considered as a predisposing factor to ESNA.

Social acceptance was not included in the pupil discourses. The social focus for pupils was constructed in relation to bullying and difficulties in social interaction; bullying however, was included in the discourse as a reason for ESNA of one parent participant.

5.2.1.1.3.3 Lack of Parental Control Over School Attendance

The lack of parental control in taking the child to school, following their transition to a secondary setting, is constructed as a contributory factor by some parents. This is both due to the inability to physically move their child from the house and in relation to the level of anxiety being experienced.

5.2.1.1.4 Lack of Understanding

Lack of understanding, related to both staff and peers, is constructed as a contributory factor to ESNA. The understanding of staff is further constructed by parents in terms of the pupils' experience of how they feel that they are treated:

D	<i>... he said (...) she treats me like a normal person. So, I presume some of the other staff felt from that comment, felt didn't treat him as if he was normal.</i>
---	---

The paucity in the understanding of others is attributed to a lack of empathic understanding of anxiety by those who have not experienced it. These discourses are resonant of the pupil choice apparent in the discourse of the 'child motivated refusal to attend school,' (Kearney, 2001, p. 345) and the wilful connotations of the term 'school refusal' (Pelligrini, 2007)' such that anxiety is perceived as a choice for the pupil by others; this further perpetuates the with-in child construction of ESNA:

G	<i>I think just generally with mental health, people, unless you have experienced it yourself or you know somebody close to you that people just don't understand. Because people say anxiety and that but to actually see a child who is anxious is a, it can be really distressing and peoples just see it as, oh, they are spoiled brats, they are naughty that type of thing.</i>
---	---

Parent D further constructed such lack understanding of others in relation to the questions that the pupil faced if they engage in activities outside the school setting, which then becomes a perpetuating factor in the difficulty of resuming attendance.

Equally, it is evident how this is connected to the social isolation that is experienced by pupils as the negative cycle of ESNA is perpetuated. Indeed, the lack of understanding, which informed the early support, is constructed by Parent G as being a reason for the further development of the pupil's anxiety that subsequently led to ESNA:

G	<i>So, the way that it was handled, made her condition worse through lack of understanding...there are a few times at Primary School and I think if the situation had been handled differently she would have actually gone back in the classroom.</i>
---	--

5.2.1.1.4.1 ASD

The discourse of Parent F further constructed the lack of understanding specifically in relation to ASD needs as a perpetuating factor of anxiety. This illustrative quotation is also indicative of the concomitant difficulty of lack of understanding and delayed intervention, which thus allowed the attendance difficulty to develop:

F	<i>...they just weren't picking up on anything all of her difficulties and that is when her anxiety really started and it just got worse and worse each year.</i>
---	---

The lack of understanding of the pupil's needs, coupled with their attempts to manage anxiety is constructed as further exacerbating the attendance difficulty. It should be questioned however, why the pupil felt the need to 'mask' their difficulty; equally, this highlights the issue of the awareness staff have of 'hidden' disabilities and the avenues of communication through which pupils' needs are conveyed. Furthermore, it is reasonable to suggest that this is related to the discourse which constructs a lack of support for the pupil in managing their anxiety as a contributory factor to ESNA.

5.2.1.1.5 Support and Provision

All parents constructed issues with support and provision as a contributory factor to ESNA and aligned this with lack of understanding; this construction extends to lack of early intervention when attendance difficulties presented:

G	<i>I honestly think at Primary School, and I know hindsight, if the Primary School if they had invested the time there she wouldn't have gone through all those years of not accessing her education.</i>
---	---

Lack of facilities aimed to specifically meet the needs of an anxious pupil is explicitly constructed in the discourse of Parent D as also being a perpetuating factor of the attendance difficulty, such that it was obstructive to a return to school. Parent F constructed the perpetuating impact of the lack of support as one that has resulted in trauma; this discourse also reflects the lack of support for parents in terms of how to manage non-attendance issues. Such lack of support was discussed by two parent participants; whilst this was not constructed as a reason for the pupil's non-attendance, this should be considered in light of the tentative link between the parent's capacity and perseverance in managing the ESNA and a positive outcome for the pupil (Carless et al, 2013).

F	<i>She has got a lot of trauma around school. I think because she struggles so much but she just kept going you know because I didn't know what else to do but just keep sending her.</i>
---	---

5.2.1.1.5.1 Inconsistency of Support

Aligned with the construct of lack of provision is the inconsistency of support as a contributory factor to the attendance difficulty, in terms of perpetuating the pupil's level of anxiety. Parents included the inconsistency of a relationship as a perpetuating contributory factor of the pupils' ESNA with staff often being taken away by other

commitments in the school setting. Establishing and maintaining a supportive relationship with a member of staff, and pupils knowing what is expected of them, are thus cited as important factors in facilitating the attendance and reintegration of pupils (Archer, Filmer-Sankey and Fletcher-Campbell, 2003). This is further constructed as detrimental in the early presentation of attendance difficulties, at secondary or primary school, and disadvantageous to a pupil presenting with an attachment issue such that the relationship within school is not secure.

G	<i>... one time she actually went into the classroom at a break time and it was a massive step and the next day I said "okay somebody will come and collect you at" and they never turned up and for her it was a massive disappointment.</i>
---	---

This discourse is further constructed in relation to the coordination of interventions and support from outside agencies and is aligned with the research findings of an unsystematic approach across local authorities (Archer, Filmer-Sankey and Fletcher-Campbell, 2003). Moreover, the assumed perception of lack of understanding of others is constructed as a contributory factor to the difficulty in accessing specialist support.

5.2.1.1.5.2 Delay in Accessing Support

Parents constructed the delay in accessing support as perpetuating non-attendance and being the cause of further difficulties in social interaction and social isolation. The discourse of Parent D referred to a ‘*downwards spiral*’, which may be framed as an example of the ‘Vicious Cycle of School Refusal’ (Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, 2008: Figure 13).

Parent E constructed such a delay in the wider context of lack of support for children and young people’s mental health, but also aligns this with the dominant legal

discourse and the focus on punitive consequences for non-attendance rather than the reasons for the absence.

E	<i>I feel like enough isn't done for young people from a mental health and I think if the school had worked a bit more instead of pointing the finger and putting fines from the council through my door, instead of letting me know actually she is not contributing as much to class or yeah we [could] have seen.</i>
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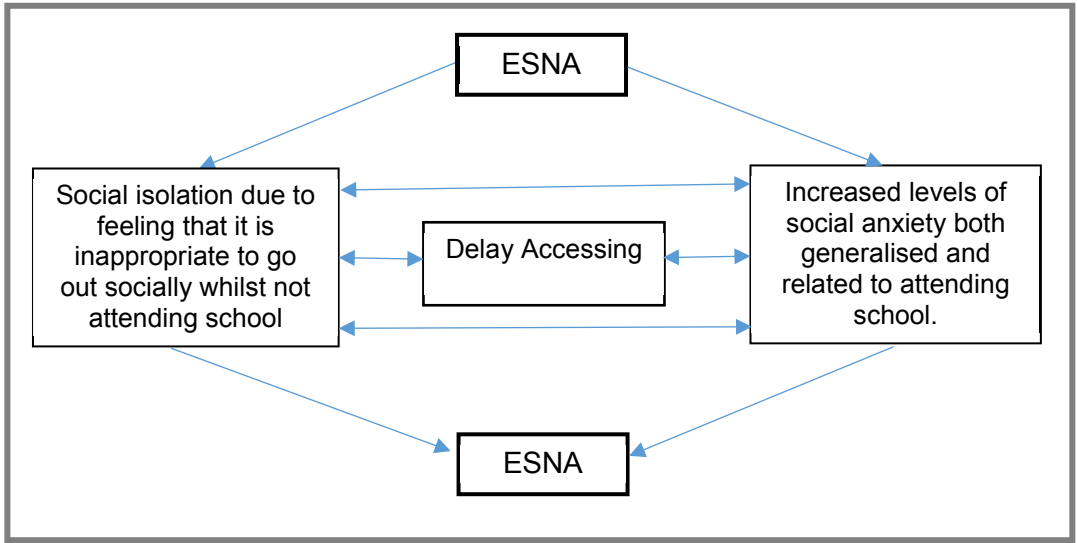


Fig. 13: An Illustrative Example of The Vicious Cycle of ESNA based on Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, (2008)

The delay experienced in accessing professional support, either via public services or privately, is further constructed as a reason for ESNA by Parent G. With regards to CAMHS, the prioritising of services for those who are in crisis is constructed as a reason for this delay:

G	<i>...they actually said to me that we are only seeing our Psychiatrists, CAMHS are only seeing in patients who have attempted suicide or who are seriously self-harming</i>
---	--

5.2.1.1.5.3 Unsuitable Support and Provision

The parent discourses included unsuitable support and provision, both as a precipitatory and perpetuating factor of ESNA. This was attributed to environmental factors that increased the pupil's anxiety and the range of needs and purposes that the provision was serving:

D	<i>...there were children coming throwing chairs and what not...it was the noise and quite a difficult environment for a child that is feeling anxious to be in... it has really not been appropriate and because of that he has not felt able to get back in.</i>
---	--

Parent G constructed such a difficulty in providing for this population as being due to the problematic categorisation of the pupils' needs. It is reasonable to suggest however, that this is to be expected, such is the heterogeneous nature this population and may also be assumed to be related to the construct of lack of understanding of the needs of pupils experiencing ESNA:

G	<i>...they are not in mainstream school, they are not physically disabled, they haven't got learning difficulties, they are not naughty children... it's like well this is the dregs as it were. But it's not the dregs but these children that don't fit into any other [category].</i>
---	--

The social isolation brought by accessing alternative provision in being separated from the age appropriate peer group, for lessons and break times, is constructed as a consequence of accessing unsuitable provision. In consideration of the cycle of non-attendance, such social isolation may be considered a contributory factor in the negative spiral of difficulties.

The specific strategies employed by schools aimed at supporting the pupil are further constructed as being detrimental in light of the presenting needs. Such difficulties, are

also constructed by parents in relation to an alternative provision in the LA, which serves a broad range of needs and to a specialist educational setting within the city.

5.2.1.1.6 Depression and Self harm

Two of the parents constructed depression as a contributory factor and referred to their child's engagement in self-injurious behaviours. This is constructed in the wider context of the lack of discussion around mental health issues. It is interesting that Parent E constructed depression as the precipitatory factor and anxiety as secondary to this, although the focus of the interventions offered was reportedly on the latter. It should be questioned therefore, if this focus reflects the dominant discourse of 'anxious non-attenders' in the local authority around non-attendance.

The discourse of Parent F is indicative of the severity of this illness; the attendance difficulties of the pupil are constructed as resulting in the pupil taking an overdose, after which they did not return to school.

F	<i>Well he prescribed her anti-depressants and a few weeks after that she took an overdose and then she was admitted again and discharged but she didn't go back to school after that.</i>
---	--

5.2.2 Variant Parent Constructions of ESNA

There are clear similarities in the discourses between parents and pupils although there is evident divergence in the specifics of the constructions in terms of the contributory factors. A number of parent discourses however, differ from those of the pupil participants.

5.2.2.1 Parental View of Education

The discourse of one parent included their own view of education, the absence of such in the pupils' discourse is perhaps unsurprising. Whilst low parental value of education

is reported as negatively impacting on pupils' attendance (Lyon and Cotler, 2007), the discourse of Parent E is concerned with alternatives to attending full time education and to completing exams at the expected age. Equally, this discourse constructs education as valuable and with awareness of the pupil's current mental health difficulties. Whilst, it is reasonable to consider the role of such an alternative model of education on the pupil's attendance, it should not be assumed that taking an alternative path equates to a low value being placed on education:

E	<i>I didn't get my exams and I had (...) kids before I started doing A levels and NV's and so I said to her if I can do it in my 30's. You know I am not going to push her and simple as that. She is not a stupid girl. I said but you have got to put your study in and then even if you fail everything it doesn't matter, there is always Further Education. Do you know? I am not going to put no pressure on her. Because I feel like if I put too much pressure on her she will break.</i>
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5.2.2.2 Delay in Accessing Support

The variant parent constructions are predominantly concerned with the delay in accessing support and are illustrative of an overview of the systemic difficulties that contribute to the pupils' ESNA.

5.2.2.2.1 Communication between Systems

The lack of communication between the school and the parent is constructed by Parent E as being a contributory factor to the delay in support and detrimental to the pupil's wellbeing, such that the parent was unaware of the change in presentation of their child in the school setting. Similarly, the relationship between the school and the medical systems (CAMHS), is constructed as a contributory factor to such a delay by Parent D. If considered in terms of the Bioecological Developmental Model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and the need for a 'multi-systemic approach (Lauchlan, 2003), the lack of shared information in the mesosystem is thus constructed as having a direct impact on the outcomes for the pupil. In terms of the role of the educational setting, this is interesting

to consider in light of the integrated pathway of mental health services, based around multi-systemic support and intervention, which positions schools as one of the services to provide tier 1 mental health support for pupils (NHS, 2014).

5.2.2.2.2 Recording of Absence

This is further evident in the construct of Parent D concerning the categorising of absence as authorised and unauthorised and the delay that this may cause in the attendance difficulty being recognised. This construct is therefore aligned with the legal discourse of school attendance and also the masking of the prevalence of the difficulty, both in relation to individual pupils and the scale of ESNA amongst the pupil population due to the systematic recording of attendance (Reid, 2008).

5.2.2.2.3 Developmental and Social Contributory Factors

It is interesting to consider that the developmental phase of the young person is constructed by Parent E as a reason why the difficulties may be missed such that hormonal changes can result in a presentation similar to depression. This is indicative of the importance of those around the young person being aware of predisposing and precipitatory factors that can lead to mental health difficulties, not just in relation to ESNA but to the young person's well-being:

E	<i>Because there is going to be mood swings and that is all due to hormones, puberty and I get that but when it comes to self-harming and people stop eating and drinking and cut themselves off socially and even form their own family then there is obviously a problem.</i>
---	---

5.2.2.2.4 Education Health Care Plan

The delay in obtaining an Education Health Care Plan is constructed by Parent F as a perpetuating factor ESNA. Whilst the time scale cited is reflective of the 20 weeks allocated for the completion of the statutory assessment process, this resulted in a

further six months of non-attendance and was subsequent to a period of ESNA. It should be considered that only one pupil participant had EP involvement, which is required for statutory assessment within this local authority, and Parent D reported difficulties in accessing such involvement. This discourse therefore, may reflect contributory difficulties to ESNA in the wider system regarding procedures and protocol.

5.2.2.3 Lack of Support and Provision

5.2.2.3.1 Lack of Resources

Lack of resources is constructed by two of the parents in connection to the inconsistency of a supportive relationship in the school system. One parent specifically included this with reference to the reintegration of pupils back into the school system; this is then constructed as a perpetuating factor of ESNA. This further reflects the parental overview of the systemic difficulties, which may not be anticipated in the pupil discourses:

D	<i>Preparation to go back in is non-existent... his anxiety was so severe that he almost needed somebody that you know was going to come and meet him at the gates, was going to be around all the time that he was there and that would then sort of take him back to the gate but they just haven't got the resources for that.</i>
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5.2.2.3.2 Negative Reciprocity of Lack Support and Lack of Understanding

The connection between these two discourses is constructed as reciprocal such that lack of understanding of the difficulty contributes to the lack of staffing resources to provide support, which thus further perpetuates the lack of understanding. This is illustrative of how the contributory difficulties of ESNA may be perpetuated by the negative reciprocity of factors within the school system (Figure 14):

F	<i>There wasn't enough time for a teacher to sit there and listen to all her worries so they would only get a tiny bit of the picture of what was happening, what was going on inside her and you know they didn't really see how bad it was.</i>
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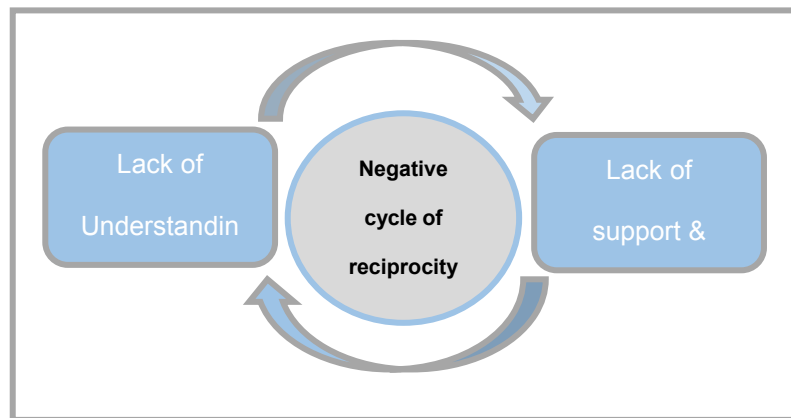


Fig. 14: Negative Reciprocity of Contributory Factors in the School System

5.3 Staff Discussion and Findings

Like the parents' discourse, staff discourses of the reasons for ESNA are dominated by anxiety to a greater extent than those of the pupil participants. There is however, a greater emphasis on within child explanations and within family factors amongst staff discourse, which draws heavily on the medical discourse of ESNA (Figure 15). The staff discourses that correspond to those of the pupils and parents will first be discussed, before examining those which are only similar to one of these participant groups. Finally, the discourses that are particular to the staff participants will be discussed.

5.3.1 Corresponding Staff, Parent and Pupil Constructions

5.3.1.1 Anxiety

Whilst all of the staff constructed anxiety as a reason for attendance difficulties, two staff participants constructed this as an overarching reason for ESNA:

H	<i>I mean in a way you could say that anxiety with all of them probably and then beneath that is learning needs, home circumstances, behavioural difficulties, you know the things that go along side that. Generally speaking, something about this path causes anxiety and that is why they are not in school.</i>
J	<i>I think most of our non-attenders suffer with this [anxiety]. Now whether they suffer with this because of this or other issues I don't know. But it all links, there is always this in the reports from the doctors. You know that they have anxiety</i>

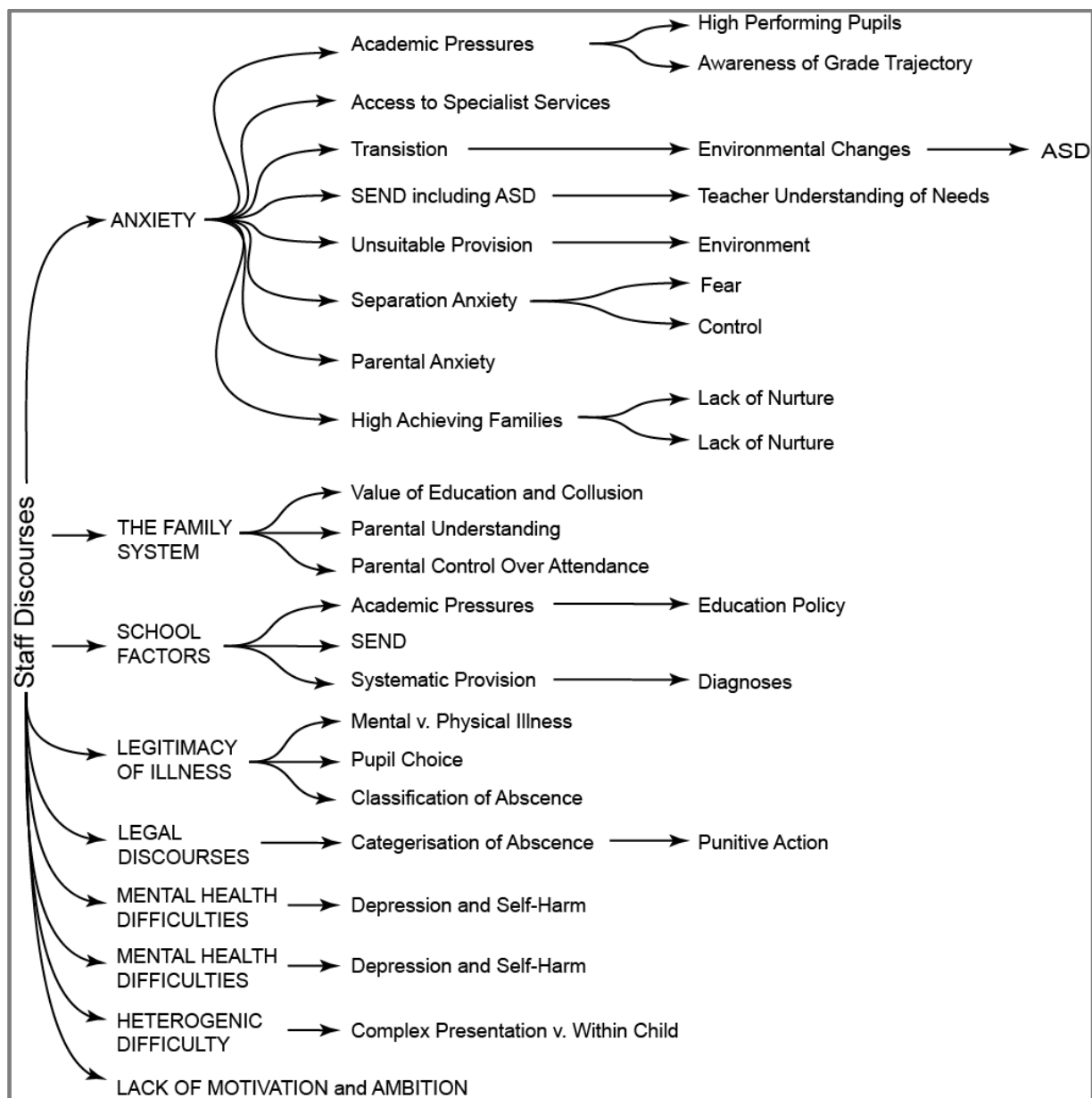


Fig. 15: Staff Discourses of ESNA

5.3.1.1.1 Academic pressures

The academic pressures of education are constructed as directly linked to anxiety and to subsequent school refusal by two staff participants. The construction of such however, was concerned with being high performing and the pupil's awareness of the corresponding grade trajectory from when they commenced secondary school, resulting in self-imposed pressure. Whilst this constructs academic pressure as a cause of anxiety therefore, it is further constructed as a within child difficulty such that the pupil puts themselves under pressure:

J	<i>...he is non-attending at the moment but he is a high performer. And he has got quite profound mental health issues now and he has been signed off school but its, a lot of it is because he puts himself under so much pressure because he knows that he should be performing, he is finding it difficult and he just can't cope and he's broken down now to the point where he is not coming into school.</i>
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5.3.1.1.2 Access to Specialist Services

Whilst not prominent in the discourse of staff participants, the construct of Staff A is illustrative of the difficulty in accessing CAMHS and the negative spiral that can result in relation to ESNA and supporting the pupil. This may be constructed as a cycle of non-attendance such that the difficulty is managed through ESNA, which thus becomes self-perpetuating:

H	<i>...because he is very successful at getting parents to keep him at home he is not experiencing the anxiety so they (CAMHS) can't help him with the anxiety. So, we are having to persuade everyone that they, however he presents they have got to get him here because he needs to be experiencing that anxiety for the mental health worker then to help him with that anxiety.</i>
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5.3.1.1.3 Transition

Transition is constructed as a contributory factor to increased anxiety, due to the environmental and logistical changes that can be problematic, resulting in the pupil experiencing a sense of being overwhelmed. The intervention regarding difficulties with

transition is reportedly reactive rather than proactive, which has implications for early intervention strategies to support pupils at risk of experiencing ESNA:

H	<i>I think that is one where transition perhaps hasn't worked as well and they are not coping with the transition into Secondary. I think the large environment, the movement from one place to another, the amount of staff that they have, the whole thing is too big and too, you know, and they find that a bit overwhelming.</i>
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5.3.1.1.4 Additional Needs Including ASD

Staff discourses constructed the additional needs of ADHD and ASD as a contributory factor to ESNA and increased anxiety, due to the characteristic difficulties of social interaction with regards to the latter. Transition is also included in this discourse of Staff J as being potentially problematic for pupils with autism due to them previously being *'taken care of a lot at primary school,'* and the often comorbid sensory processing difficulties. It is interesting to note that this staff participant includes issues with school uniform in addition to environmental factors and, whilst speculative, it is questionable to what degree such difficulties are currently considered, particularly with the apparent drive for a cohesively uniformed pupil population in schools.

5.3.1.1.4.1 Teacher Understanding

The role of teachers is included in the discourse of Staff J in relation to meeting the needs of ASD pupils. This is constructed in relation to the teachers' lack of understanding of these needs, but also the pressures that teachers are under to meet the needs of a diverse group of pupils and whether the staff have the time and knowledge of the necessary range of strategies. This staff member attributes this to a need for training to prevent pupils with ASD becoming non-attenders, thus recognising the need for intervention at a systemic level (Archer, Filmer-Sankay and Fletcher-Campbell, 2003)

5.3.1.1.5 Unsuitable Provision

Staff J constructed the unsuitable provision in the school as a contributory factor due to the diverse purposes that the provision serves and that this is therefore a stressful environment for '*vulnerable pupils*', such that this increased the pupil's level of anxiety.

5.3.1.2 Mental Health Difficulties

The broader descriptor of 'mental health difficulties' is constructed as a contributory factor to attendance difficulties and further constructed as a learning need, such that this becomes a barrier to learning. This is interesting to examine in relation to the construct of the legitimacy of the illness: it may be considered that a learning difficulty has greater 'legitimacy' than an emotional need, whilst this also serves to further perpetuate a 'within child' construction:

H	<i>[He] is in fact a bright student and should academically should be able to achieve, wasn't achieving because of those other emotional things. So, it is a learning need in that respect and he can't learn in that environment.</i>
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5.3.1.2.1 Depression and Self-Harm

Staff J was the only staff member to construct low mood as a contributory factor to ESNA; depression is thus not prominent in the staff discourses. Mental health difficulties are however, constructed as a result of pupils being sent to school when they are experiencing emotional difficulties.

Self-harm is included in the discourse of one staff member and constructed in relation to the diagnosis of ASD. The self-injurious behaviour was directly linked to school in this instance and, such was the risk factor brought by attending school, the pupil became non-attending; this is therefore constructed by staff as a perpetuating factor of ESNA.

5.3.2 Corresponding Staff and Parent Constructions

There are few discourses that correspond only between the parent and staff participant groups, other than separation anxiety and the legal consequences of ESNA. The latter was only included by the pupil group in relation to the understanding of professionals and the pupil's experience of lack of understanding.

5.3.2.1 Separation Anxiety

One staff participant constructed separation anxiety in relation to attendance difficulties. Whilst this featured in the construction of Parent G, in this instance the separation issue is constructed in relation to attachment; the staff discourse however, constructed the separation difficulty as an issue of fear and control:

H	<i>They get, they close down their world more and more and more and then retreat into the home and it is about keeping things controlled. Very often it is about, there might be parents involved too and who would then have to be at home with them.</i>
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5.3.2.2 Legal Discourses

The legal consequences of non-attendance due to the problematic categorisation of absence as authorised or unauthorised, is included by one staff member, and which reflected the progression of steps taken by the school when dealing with attendance difficulties; such steps were constructed as obstructive and detrimental in the parent discourse. This is consistent with the literature regarding the systems of recording absence (Reid, 2008; Birioukov, 2016) but, rather than being problematic in terms of masking the extent of the difficulty for the pupils, this is constructed as problematic for the school such that attendance figures are required to be recorded and reported (DFE, 2016).

I	<i>We are now in a position of deciding do we authorise the absence or is that unauthorised...the person on SLT that is in charge of attendance I think she looks at it as right what have we</i>
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	<i>done to get the child back in? Right have we been round? Have we had a meeting with the parent? Have we sent a letter to say that we are going to fine them?</i>
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5.3.3 Corresponding Staff and Pupil Constructions

There are no evident constructions that correspond singularly between the discourses of the staff and pupil participant groups that are not also constructed as contributory factors by the parents.

5.3.4 Staff constructions at Variance with Parent and Pupil Constructions

There are a number of parent and/or staff discourses that are not expressed by the pupils.

5.3.4.1 Anxiety

5.3.4.1.1 Parental Anxiety

The discourse of one staff member, constructed the child as anxious due to parental anxiety, such that the child has '*absorbed*' anxiety from the parents, this is consistent with the family factors presented in the literature (McShane, Walter and Rey, 2001; Thambirajah, Grandison and De-Hayes, (2008). The construction of anxiety in relation to the family system is further consistent with the systemic model of development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), which thus constructs the origin of the within child difficulty as a family issue.

H	<i>I mean in a way you could say that anxiety with all of them probably and then beneath that is learning needs, home circumstances, behavioural difficulties, you know the things that go along side that. Generally speaking, something about this path causes anxiety and that is why they are not in school...</i>
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5.3.4.1.2 High Achieving Families

The high value of education, in terms of the model of achievement within the family, is constructed as a contributory factor in the need for the pupil to emulate this and the overt or covert pressure that this can bring to bear on the pupil. This is related to the construction of anxiety by Staff J:

J	<i>I don't know whether it is the family that have put pressure because both children are very bright. So, I don't know if that maybe has weighted down but certainly for him, you know, he broke. And then he got the anxiety of coming into school to the point where he wouldn't even come into [the student support area].</i>
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5.3.4.2 Legitimacy of the 'Illness'

One of the staff participants constructed anxiety as a reason for ESNA in comparison to the perception of a 'proper illness', assumed to be physical. It is reasonable to suggest however, that this staff discourse, is linked to the parent and pupil discourses concerned with the understanding of others, in being illustrative of such.

The legitimacy of the illness is further constructed in the context of the authorised/unauthorised dichotomy, reflective of the legal obligation of schools to record and categorise absence (DFE, 2016). The discourse of Staff I however, has connotations of the 'wilful' or 'child motivated' construction of attendance difficulties such that it is resonant of attendance being a matter of decision. This is in contrast to the parental construction of anxiety as a 'debilitating' and as a 'barrier' to attendance that 'paralyses' the pupil, or the pupil construction of this contributory factor that renders them feeling unable to cope in the school environment and experiencing associated mental health difficulties, including suicidal ideations, self-harm and depression:

I	<i>...that is really difficult because then we understand that this individual has anxiety, so we do understand that, but it's where is the point that the anxiety is too much to come to school and who makes that decision? And then should so, at the moment we are now in a position of deciding do we authorise the absence or is that unauthorised.</i>
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This is further evident in the discourse of this staff participant in constructing anxiety as a 'normal' emotion and questioning the point at which this becomes problematic. Moreover, the discourse constructs pupils who self-harm as making an active choice to do so, in order that they either can't come to school or do not want to, and further questions whether pupils should be encouraged to push the boundaries of their anxiety. The level of anxiety evident in the discourse of the pupils and parents however, is not constructed as a difficulty that can be resolved through pushing boundaries. Indeed Parent E explicitly stated their fear that their child will '*break*' should they be pushed to attend school, whilst Parent F reported their child's attempted suicide. It may be considered that the construction of Staff I therefore, is indicative of the lack of understanding of ESNA and the concomitant difficulties that are constructed as a contributory factor by pupils and parents.

5.3.4.2 The Family System

The staff discourse constructed the family as a having a contributory role in the pupil's ESNA and focused on the child's social-emotional developmental experiences in this system. This included disruption with parental relationships and whether the pupil had two parents at home, the former of which is consistent with the family factors presented Thambirajah, Grandison and De Hayes (2008). The contributory role of the family is further constructed by Staff H however, in relation to the level of nurture experienced by the child and the use of wrap around day care since a young age, which is correlated with parents who are high achieving professionals.

Whist constructed as part of a complex issue, this discourse is of concern on several counts, not least because it cannot be assumed that the use of childcare equates to a lack of nurture or that high achieving parents are correlated with a reduced level of such nurturing. It is also interesting how this discourse constructs ESNA as a developmental systemic difficulty within family, therefore delineating the role of the school system, which is contradictory to the multi-systemic and multi-factorial nature of ESNA (Lauchlan, 2003):

H	<i>...maybe those sort of families where parents are high achievers and professionals you know, maybe there isn't as much nurture at home as there might be for other students. That is part of it as well...and maybe these are students who have been in wrap around day care since they were very young.</i>
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5.3.4.2.1 Value of Education and Collusion

In part, this discourse is consistent with research that aligns the parental value of education with non-attendance and constructs parents as actively colluding in their child's absence (Lyon and Cotler, 2007). Equally, it is recognised by staff that it is challenging for parents to continue to send their child to school such that the pupil is communicating their difficulties through their behaviour, and that parents may have a lack of knowledge regarding how to support the pupil's reintegration. This is then linked to the following construct of parental understanding of needs.

5.3.4.2.2 Parental Understanding

This is further constructed in relation to holding the parental-child boundaries and 'training' for parents to understand why their child should attend school. This staff discourse therefore, constructs a lack of understanding of the pupil's needs on the parent's behalf and further constructs the non-attendance as a within family difficulty

in this respect; this is interesting to consider in terms of the parent and pupil constructs around lack of understanding in the school system as a contributory factor.

5.3.4.2.3 Lack of Ambition and Motivation

Lack of ambition and motivation is constructed as an underpinning factor by Staff I. This appears to be corroborative with the discourse of Pupil B, the pupil construct was concerned with the relevance of the curriculum, whilst Staff I constructed lack of motivation to attend school as being due to lack of ambition and the pupil therefore not seeing the purpose of education. This is further constructed as a within family, intergenerational cycle in which children whose parents did not achieve at school believe they will follow the same path. Whilst this is consistent with research findings (Lyon and Cotler, 2007), it is interesting to consider this discourse in the context of Pupil B's construct that located the difficulty of motivation and engagement within the curriculum and therefore the school system; in contrast the staff discourse, again delineates the focus from the educational setting to a within child and within family difficulty.

5.3.4.2.4 Parental Control over Attendance

Staff I constructed parental control over attendance as a contributory factor, such that parents are positioned as able to take measures to ensure that their child travels to school. Both parent and pupil participants however construct lack of control, due to physical size and level of anxiety, as a contributory factor to ESNA, which is consistent with the research (Goodman and Scott, 2012), and as such, the construction of this discourse is at variance with these participant groups:

I	<i>... so a child with anxiety and is struggling to get in if the parent can either walk them in or bring them in the car, that may reduce a chunk of anxiety for that child which then means they are in the building and they make it to school.</i>
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5.3.4.3 School factors

The staff participants constructed issues within the school system as contributory factors to the pupils' attendance difficulties. This is further constructed in regard to the following discourses.

5.3.4.3.1 Academic Pressures: Educational Policy

All staff constructed the academic pressures that pupils experience as a contributory factor within the school system. This construct has been discussed in relation to anxiety, but is further evident in the discourse of Staff I in relation to pressures brought by top-down initiatives of government policy and current pedagogical practice. This relates to a lack of flexibility resulting in a curriculum that pupils are less likely to engage in. This discourse reflects that of Pupil B concerning their experience of the lack of relevance of the curriculum:

I	<i>The government kind of fact that they have to do their GCSE's and the fact that they have to do focus on these qualifications. And I think actually that does impact because if schools were more flexible in their what they offered to the children and they could be more person centred then the students would more likely engage because it is something they want to engage in.</i>
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5.3.4.3.2 Special Educational Needs

Pupils' special educational needs and how these are met is constructed as a contributory factor by all staff members. This reflected the need for training at a systemic level to increase staff understanding of SEND:

J	<i>If we could get much more training done, get people to understand autism a lot more, some of our kind of higher tariff ones won't end up [non-attending]... Because you know like the ones that are the non-attenders you know two are Autistic and yet could we have done something a lot sooner if we had had more training, if people were more aware of how strategies of how to kind of incorporate and kind of make them feel better in the lessons.</i>
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5.3.4.4 Systemic Provision

A lack of specialist provision within the wider system of the local authority is further constructed as a contributory factor in terms of the shortage of spaces available in such settings. This is further constructed in relation to the parents' views of the inadequacy of the school provision. Whilst the construct is concerned with the support that may be beneficial to the pupil, this discourse constructs the difficulty in regard to the parental frustration rather than in relation to the school system. This should be considered in the context of inclusion and the role of mainstream schools in meeting the needs of pupils with SEND:

I	<i>...parents may get frustrated because actually they feel that the reason that their child is struggling at school is because of their SEN need and then the school isn't meeting their SEN need and so we have had parents say we are not sending our child into the school because we feel that our child should be at a specialist setting.</i>
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One staff member further constructed lack of systemic provision in terms of the waiting lists for diagnoses, such as neurodevelopmental disorders, as a direct cause of absence. Staff I referred to the struggle that the pupil was experiencing whilst waiting for a clinical diagnosis. This is resonant of the parental discourse of the delay in access to resources, which referred to the school waiting for professional services involvement before intervening. Such a diagnosis however, whilst providing a label for the difficulties does not change the presenting needs of the pupil. This is therefore, part of the wider debate concerned with the social construction of labels and diagnoses and how these facilitate or impede the meeting of pupils' needs.

5.3.5 A Heterogeneous Difficulty

The staff discourses constructed the difficulty within child and related to factors within the family system to a much greater extent than the other participant groups; this is consistent with the research that has previously found this to be the case (Malcolm et al 2003). This is contradictory however, to the discourses of these participants that construct ESNA as a heterogeneous difficulty, which inherently recognise the individuality of the attendance issue. This may be indicative of the staff discourses being constructed in relation to an overview of their experience of a number of pupils with ESNA rather than concerned with an individual case.

H	<i>What I find very difficult about school refusal is it is very, very complex and everything is tied up together and it is very difficult to actually deal with...school refusal is how [difficulties present], there can be lots of different things at the heart of it.</i>
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Whilst the individuality is recognised in these constructions however, ESNA is also constructed remains a predominantly within child construction by this participant group.

I	<i>I: Because everybody is different I guess for all of these, not all of them but a lot of it is within person and that is why it is so difficult.</i>
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5. 4 Research Question 3

In consideration of RQ3, the construction of anxiety as a reason ESNA may be aligned with the functional model of ESNA (Kearney and Silverman, 1996), such that the non-attendance is a means of managing the level of anxiety. Indeed, Staff A constructed the non-attending behaviour as a communication of an underlying difficulty. The predisposing, precipitating and perpetuating factors that contribute to experiencing an increase of this affect are however individualised in the pupils' discourse. Figure 16 illustrates the construction of anxiety as a perpetuating factor for Pupil B that

exacerbated the attendance difficulty, whilst Figure 17 represents the constructions of Pupils A and C for whom anxiety was constructed as a predisposing and precipitating factor. Anxiety therefore is not necessarily constructed as a cause of ESNA by the pupil participants.

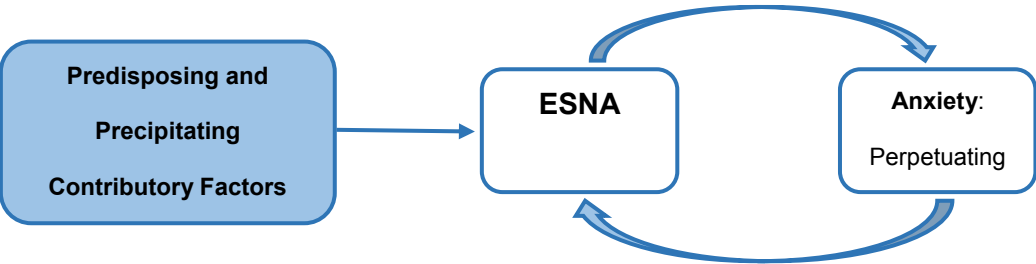


Fig. 16: The Construct of Anxiety: Pupil B

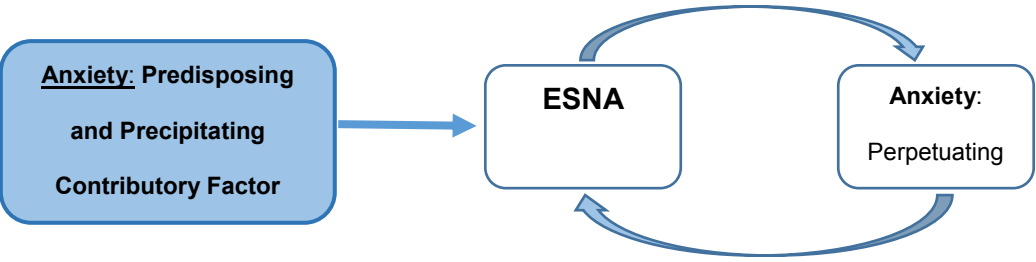


Fig. 17: The Construct of Anxiety: Pupils A and C

Whilst the discourse of anxiety is the dominant discourse of the parent participants and the staff group, the analysis of these constructs, depicted in the visual representations (Figures 12 and 15), is illustrative of this singular explanation being too simplistic, such is the heterogeneous nature of the presenting difficulties. The term ‘anxious non-attenders’ therefore is not consistent with the complex constructions of ESNA by the participant groups.

5.5 Chapter Summary

The parental discourses of the causes of ESNA are dominated by anxiety, which concurrently draws upon medicalised explanations to some degree. Whilst this may be considered to be consistent with the construction of pupils as anxious non-attenders, the examination of the discourse of this participant group is illustrative of the complexity of the presenting difficulty.

Whilst the staff discourse features anxiety, there is a much greater focus on within child and within family explanations of ESNA, which thus results in pathologising the pupil rather than considering systemic factors at a school level.

The implications of the findings of the research will be considered in the following chapter, in the context of the strengths and limitations of this study.

Chapter 6: Implications, Limitations, Strengths and Conclusions

6.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, the implications of the findings of this research will be examined in terms of considering appropriate support and intervention for pupils at risk of attendance difficulties and for those who are experiencing ESNA, with particular consideration of the role of the EP. The limitations and strengths of this study will then be considered before drawing final conclusions from the research.

6.2 Implications of the Research

6.2.1 Discourses of Power

The findings of the research are consistent with the literature in the staff construction of the attendance difficulty as within child and within the family, whilst pupils rarely identify such contributory factors (Malcolm et al, 2003). Indeed, both the parent and pupil discourses constructed the school system and wider services as a significant contributory factors. Notably however, within child explanations are drawn upon by the parent participants. This has implications therefore, for the way the self and the other are constructed through discourse.

The staff discourses may be considered to reflect those that are dominant around the way in which professionals work with children:

‘...the recent history of professionals working with children reveals two competing and perhaps mutually dependent discourses: firstly that a young person is in need of adult protection and support, and secondly, that a young person is in need of adult instruction, control or even punishment.’

(Billington, 2008, p. 2-3)

Such discourse therefore, construct pupils as a vulnerable group, in need of adult support and instruction, akin to an ‘expert’ role. Billington (2008) states that this is constitutive of being a marginalised population in society where the pupils have little power and where their voice is quelled and disqualified by the dominance of the discourse of others. The dominant discourses may be framed as a Foucauldian ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault, 1980), which is maintained in society through the performative acts of labelling the difficulty and the interventions and support available for pupils, such that these are decided by those in power in accordance with their construction of the difficulty. In this research, the strategies described by staff as the positive steps taken to meet the needs of those experiencing attendance difficulties, are the very strategies that both pupils and parents construct as unhelpful and even detrimental. This has implications for the inclusion of pupil voice, not only in research but also in practice, in order that pupils are included in identifying difficulties and in deciding a way forward.

6.2.2 Systemic Challenges

There is further tension evident in the parent and staff discourses, as they respectively construct the cause of the difficulty in the other. It should be questioned why this is the case; it is reasonable to suggest that this constitutes a defensive discourse and also has consequences for where and who should be seeking a solution to the difficulty. This has implications for those working with the systems around the child in terms of

developing a trusting relationship between elements of the child's microsystem in order that these communicate effectively in the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

6.2.3 Pupil Discourses

The pupil discourses reflect more complex constructions of the attendance difficulty and construct reasons that are not included in the staff or parent discourses. It may be considered that this represents the complexity of their experience as it has been lived by them rather than being the perception of the difficulty by the other i.e. parents and staff. This may also be reflective of the purpose of the construction, such that parents and staff are focused on a solution for the attendance difficulty and are more keenly aware of the legal requirements for attendance and the punitive consequences of non-attendance.

6.3 Implications for EP Practice

From this research, it is apparent that the lack of suitable support and the delay in accessing this, contributed significantly to the attendance difficulty at a precipitatory and perpetuating level. As such, the focus of intervention for this population should be concerned with early intervention and those factors that contribute to the difficulty, to work with the systems around the child as well as the pupil. A suggested strategic approach is summarised in Figure 18, which is aligned with the systemic factors involved in provision in Table 22, the focus of which is on prevention and early identification.

It should be considered that, despite EPs being positioned to support the inclusion of all pupils only one pupil participant had prior EP involvement, and some parents reported difficulty in accessing such involvement. In terms of this model of support,

there is a clear role for EPs to work in supporting the individual pupil, their family and the school and to facilitate communication between these systems. Whilst this may involve individualised assessment of the presenting needs and of the potential need for therapeutic support, in light of the defensive discourses, the EP has a role in bringing understanding of the interaction of systemic factors to the school and parents, which recognises the multiplicity of contributory factors, and that aims to build capacity in the systemic relationships.

The delay in accessing professional support, either via public services or privately, is further constructed as a reason for ESNA by parents. With regards to CAMHS, the prioritising of services for those who are in crisis is constructed as a reason for this delay. This should be considered in the connection to the position of EPs, whose role is to ensure educational inclusion of all pupils, including those with ESNA (Gregory and Purcell, 2014), but who are also positioned to offer therapeutic interventions (Atkinson et al, 2012).

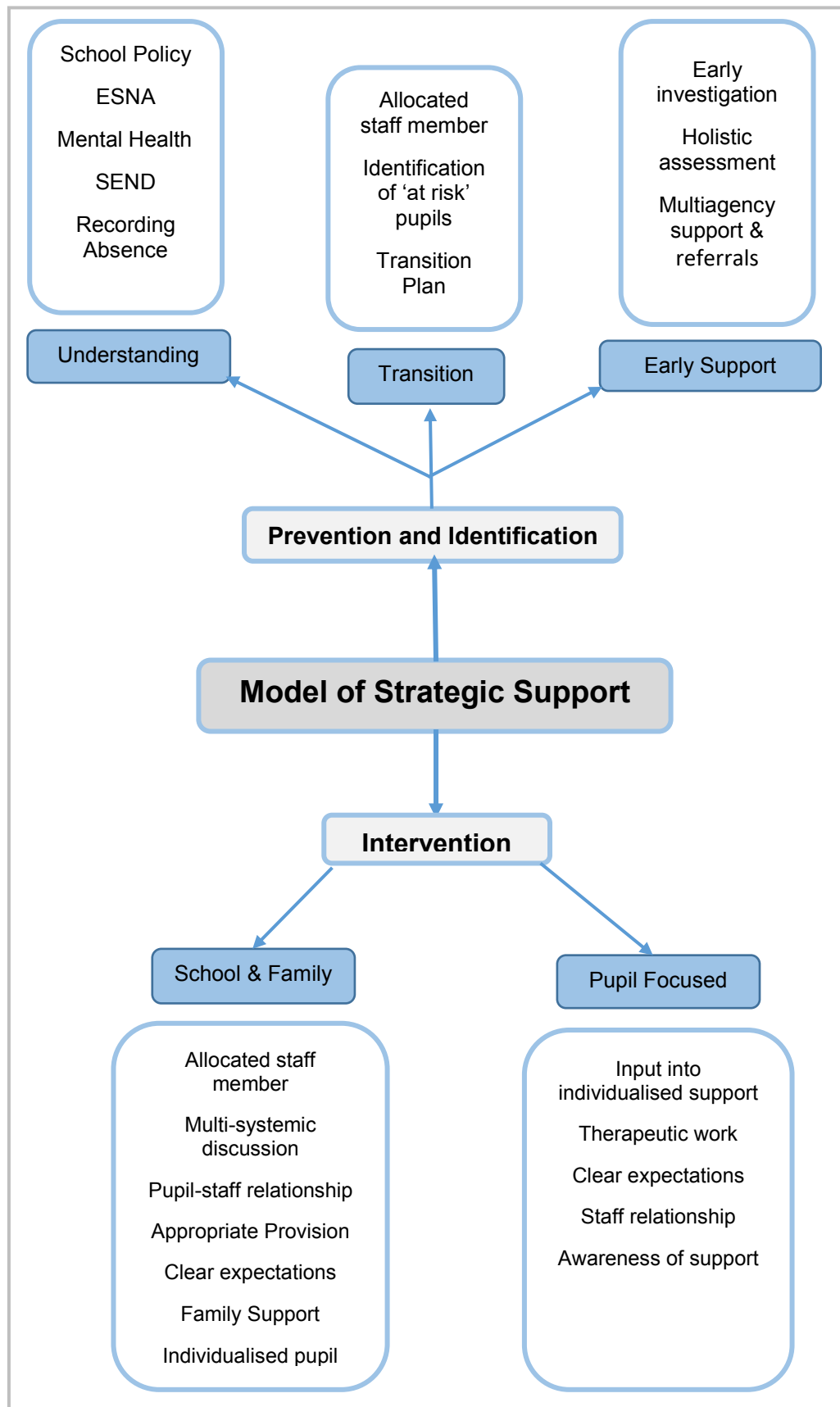


Fig. 18: Model of Strategic Prevention, Identification and Intervention of Attendance Difficulties

		ACTION	Systemic Factors Involved
PREVENTION AND IDENTIFICATION	Transition	Staff member allocated responsibility of transition focus	Primary and secondary school key staff
		Identification of ‘at risk’ pupils: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASD • A history of bullying/interpersonal difficulties • Attendance difficulties • Lack of friendship group to transition to secondary school 	Specialist practitioners as appropriate to presenting needs of pupils e.g. ASD
		Transition plan in place: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff contact, prior to transition • Staff contact maintained • Transition reviewed periodically, with pupil and parents, during the first year of secondary school 	EPS (advisory role, pupil assessment)
	Understanding	School Policy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance Difficulties • Anti-bullying 	School staff Educational Psychologists Specialist ASD practitioners Mental Health organisations e.g. The Anna Freud Centre
		School non-attendance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training re contributory factors and supporting pupils on reintegration • Pupil information re support available 	
		Mental health Difficulties: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff and Pupil training re supporting MH difficulties • Pupil education re. mental health and wellbeing 	
		SEND: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff training re the impact of ASD • Staff awareness of the needs of SEND pupils 	
		Recording absence: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor patterns of non-attendance, both authorised and unauthorised • LA systems in place to identify patterns of non-attendance 	
	Early Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early investigation of non-attendance with pupil and family • Coordinated approach between pupil, family and school for early investigation and support • Holistic assessment of attendance difficulty (inc. SRAS if appropriate) • Early involvement from multi-agency services • Appropriate referrals made 	School staff Educational Psychologists Multi-agency support as appropriate to presenting needs

INTERVENTION	School and Family Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocated staff member to maintain contact with pupil and family Discussion with pupil and family re. appropriate support informed by assessment Pupil- staff member relationship initiated and maintained Appropriate provision in school for pupil's needs, which is regularly reviewed by pupil, parents and school Clear expectations for pupil re reintegration Staff briefed re. pupil needs and appropriate support and response Family support (e.g. family therapeutic work) 	Pupil Parents School staff Educational Psychologists Multi-agency support as appropriate to presenting needs
	Pupil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Input into individualised programme of support Therapeutic work as appropriate Pupil has clear expectations re. reintegration Pupil has relationship with staff member Pupil is aware of support available both in school and outside agencies. 	

Table 22: Model of Strategic Prevention, Identification and Intervention of Attendance Difficulties

6.4 Limitations and Implications for Future Research

The limitations of the research, brought by the scale of the study and the research methods employed, are presented in Table 23 in conjunction with the defence of the research and the implications for future explorations.

Consideration of Limitations	Defence of Limitation and Implications for Future Research
<p><u>1.Generalisability of the findings:</u> Generalisability is consistent with a positivist ontology of discoverable truths and is therefore incompatible with the social constructionist position, which considers the concurrent existence of multiple realities. The findings of this research therefore represent only the realities constructed by the participants of this study. As such, these discourses do not constitute 'truths' and equally allow for other constructions of this phenomena to be explored (Gergen, 2015). Furthermore, the heterogeneous nature of the pupil population, suggests that generalisability would be</p>	<p>Generalisability is not a reasonable limitation here as it is only relevant if such is the intention of the research (Thomas, 2017).</p>

<p>an inappropriate aim of research concerning ESNA and oxymoronic to the ontological and epistemological orientation, which considers such individualised realities of the participants.</p>	
<p><u>2.Purposive Sampling:</u> The use of purposive sampling may be considered a limitation if a representative sample was being sought. In respect to the previous point regarding generalisability, the use of a random sample would only have brought further individualised constructions and so would be no more representative than the group of participants used.</p> <p>There is an evident gender bias across the participant groups of this study. The inclusion of mothers rather than fathers was not a decision made by the researcher but one of the family for a number of practical reasons.</p>	<p>Representation of a population is only important should the aim be to generalise from the findings.</p> <p>Whilst ESNA is reported to effect boys and girls equally, it may be interesting to further explore if there is a differential in the construction of ESNA between these two groups.</p>
<p><u>3.Discourse Analysis:</u> characteristic of qualitative analysis is the inherent position of the researcher in the research. The process of discourse analysis was therefore subjective such that qualitative research cannot be free of bias and values (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003) and thus necessitated proactive, reflexive practice my behalf. For example, I was aware of a sense of frustration when I returned to the interview of Staff I whose construction of anxiety and self-harm questioned the legitimacy of this illness, due to my experience of the impact of mental health difficulties on young people's lives and the discourses of the pupils and parents regarding this. Although, I was not aware of this during the interview itself, I was mindful of this position when considering the constructions and the implications of this research.</p> <p>Discourse analysis is subject to particular criticism due to the lack of cohesive understanding regarding what constitutes such analysis and the necessity of this to go beyond a summative statement of</p>	<p>The phased process of discourse analysis moved beyond the summarisation of the participant discourses, to examine and discuss these within and between participant groups in the context of the literature.</p> <p>It has been demonstrated that the method of analysis was congruent with the methodology associated with rigour in qualitative research (Smith and Noble, 2017) and an illustrative example given of the endeavour to be open to the awareness of my bias and values.</p>

<p>discourses to be considered such an analysis (Antaki et al, 2003).</p> <p>The process of discourse analysis and the use of transcripts inherently involves selection and this is dependent on the aims and background theory of the research (Wetherall, Taylor and Yates, 2003), which is influenced by the values and bias of the researcher.</p>	<p>The limitation of discourse analysis in the selection process involved in the use of transcripts is acknowledged as being influenced by the values and bias of the researcher and by the aims of the study.</p>
<p><u>4.Data collection method:</u> The discourse was not naturally occurring and was recorded. As such, the participants were aware that there was a purpose to the discussion and that I was researching school non-attendance.</p> <p>In some instances, the pupils were interviewed with parents present and one parent with their child present; this may have influenced what the participants felt able to discuss.</p>	<p>If replicated, conducting the interviews separately would be preferred to reduce the influence of participants on the other's discourse. If having the parent present however, was conducive to the pupil's sense of well-being, this ethical consideration would take priority, in accordance with the standard to do no harm (BPS, 2009).</p>
<p><u>5.Discourses of power:</u> How the discourses construct positions of power has been discussed here as an implication of the study; a fuller focus on this would be possible and should be addressed in future research.</p>	<p>A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis may be applied in future research to fully explore the discourses of power in relation to ESNA.</p>
<p><u>6.Triangulation and Crystallisation:</u> It was not considered appropriate to triangulate the data, such that the aim was not to verify 'truths' but to explore the individual discourses of the participant population.</p>	<p>Crystallisation may be employed in future research, such that a larger scale study would allow for further discourses to be explored and thus generate a more complex picture of the constructions of ESNA.</p>

Table 23: Limitations and Implications of the Research

6.5 Strengths of the Research

Due to the inherent critique of qualitative research from those aligned with the positivist paradigm, particularly concerning rigour and validity, it is necessary to consider how the value of qualitative exploration may be evidenced. Such that validity underpins all research, Tracy (2010) is amongst a number of scholars who have endeavoured to construct what constitutes validity in qualitative research. This construction is presented as eight conceptual criteria for excellence, each of which are considered in turn in regards to this study to evaluate the quality of this qualitative exploration (Table 24).

The consideration of the research in relation to these criteria supports the trustworthiness of the study as a valid piece of research. It may be suggested that this would be further enhanced by the use of participant validation or the employment of another researcher in scrutinising the data. On the first count, ideally the findings of the research would have been shared with participants to allow for reflection on the adherence of the resulting discourses of the analysis to the reasons they considered result in ESNA. In consideration of the involvement of another researcher in the analysis of the data, this would indeed allow mutual moderation of the interpretations of the data. Due to the time limitations and scale of the research and that this was conducted by a lone researcher, it was not possible however to include these measures in this instance. Whilst each should be considered in future explorations of this subject area, to further increase the trustworthiness of the research, it is suggested that the absence of these steps in this study does not detract from the overall trustworthiness of the research, as evidenced in Table 24.

Criteria of Qualitative Quality	
Worthy Topic: <i>The topic is: relevant, timely, significant, interesting, or evocative</i>	<p>The research is timely as a current priority of the LA and EPS and in the wider political context of inclusion; as such it is highly relevant to EP practice. Most significantly however, is the inclusion of the pupils' voice in this research, in providing a vehicle through which their voice is included in developing an understanding of ESNA and in matters that affect them.</p>
Rich Rigour: <i>The study uses sufficient, abundant, appropriate, and complex theoretical constructs, data and time in the field, sample(s), and context(s)</i>	<p>The inductive nature of the research allowed for requisite variety, for myself as the researcher to be open to the complexity and nuances of the data in exploring the discourses of the participant groups rather than the deductive process of proving a theory. The methods of data collection and analysis were, '...at least as complex as the phenomena being studied' (Tracy, 2010, p. 841), such that the tools employed to facilitate the discourse were bespoke to the participant group and the process of data analysis utilised corresponded with the complexity of exploring discourses of the phenomenon of ESNA. These were congruent with the research methodology and such congruence and rigour constitutes 'face validity' of the research (Golafashani, 2003), such as the study is a reasonable and appropriate area of exploration (Tracy, 2010).</p>
Sincerity: <i>The study is characterized by self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researcher(s), and transparency about the methods and challenges</i>	<p>The position of the researcher in the research process has been acknowledged as an inherent feature of qualitative exploration and the '...centrality of subjectivity' fully accepted (Thomas, 2017, p. 112), which has necessitated reflexivity throughout the research process.</p> <p>Whilst the limitations of the methods have been overtly considered (Table 22), these approaches are congruent with the ontological and epistemological position of the research.</p> <p>The transcription of the interviews verbatim and the inclusion of direct quotes further facilitates transparency</p> <p>This extended to the purpose of the research both with participants and during this thesis, such that it</p>

	was conducted for reasons that were not purely altruistic.
Credibility: <i>The research is marked by thick description, concrete detail, explication of tacit (non-textual) knowledge, and showing rather than telling, triangulation or crystallization, multivocality and member reflections</i>	<p>Thick description is achieved through the full discussion of the constructs of the participants, supported by illustrative quotations, to show rather than tell the findings of this exploration.</p> <p>Multivocality is a strength of this research in light of the inclusion of voices from different participant groups, and particularly that of the pupil voice that is often marginalised in research concerning attendance difficulties.</p> <p>This has been shown here to be of vital importance such are the differentials in the constructions of pupils, parents and staff.</p>
Resonance: <i>The research influences, affects, or moves particular readers or a variety of audiences through aesthetic, evocative representation, naturalistic generalisations and transferable findings</i>	<p>The focus of this research reveals the complexity of non-attendance beyond the consideration of the authorised/unauthorised dichotomy. Despite the necessity to generate discourse of the reasons for ESNA for the purposes of this study, the discourses are authentic given this caveat, in addition to being vivid and engaging. Those of the pupils and parents in particular, are highly emotive to impact on the reader at an emotional as well as being of interest intellectually. (Bochner, 2000).</p> <p>As the researcher, I was deeply moved by the courage of these participants in sharing their stories and by the impact on their lives and daily functioning of the precipitatory and perpetuating contributory factors; it has been my endeavour to represent this in the discussion of findings that I consider to have the capacity to 'transform the emotional disposition of people and promote greater mutual regard (Tracy, 2010, p. 844).</p> <p>The findings are not considered transferable or generalisable for the reasons outlined in Table 22.</p>
Significant Contribution: <i>The research provides a significant contribution conceptually/theoretically, practically, morally,</i>	<p>It is intended that the research will contribute to the wider pool of knowledge through publication of the findings in a journal that is accessible to the relevant professional groups.</p> <p>This research will be used to inform the discussion of appropriate provision at a strategic level in the local authority where it will be presented to the working</p>

<i>methodologically, and heuristically.</i>	group that I will continue to be involved with as an EP, and through direct involvement with schools There has already been some small change brought by the research in the terminology employed by this working group – the pupils are no longer labelled as ‘anxious non-attenders’ and in facilitating support between parents of non-attending pupils who had expressed feelings of isolation.
Ethics: <i>The research considers procedural ethics (such as human subjects), situational and culturally specific ethics, relational ethics and exiting ethics (leaving the scene and sharing the research).</i>	The ethical implications of this study were considered in depth, particularly in relation to working with a vulnerable group; these are discussed in Chapter 3. Particular consideration was given to building a relationship with the pupil participant in light of their well-being and the inherent power differential between researcher and participant. All participants were provided with details to contact the researcher after the study and the prominent findings will be shared with each participant group in an appropriate format to their age in due course.
Meaningful Coherence: <i>The study achieves what it purports to be about, uses methods and procedures that fit its stated goals, meaningfully interconnects literature, research questions/foci, findings, and interpretations with each other</i>	It is considered that this research forms a cohesive study that links relevant literature to the pertinent findings of this study. In accordance with the significant contribution, this research will be used at a practical level as well as findings being disseminated through publication, and directly to participants. Through this, the pool of knowledge is extended by the contribution of these findings to this area of research and it is hoped that this will evoke action in others to further explore the complexities of ESNA. Most importantly however, is the voice that has been given to the pupil participants to, in some small way, redress the imbalance of power in research concerned with this vulnerable group and for the individuals involved in this study.

Table 24: Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research (Tracy, 2010)

Despite the limitations of this research, the reflexivity employed to consider the validity of the study is illustrative of the rigour that can be employed in qualitative study. It is

reasonable to suggest that this research meets the criteria specified by Tracy (2010) sufficiently to be considered a valid qualitative exploration of ESNA.

6.6 Conclusion

This research succeeded in exploring the discourses of the pupils, parents and staff to examine the construction of the reasons for ESNA amongst these participant groups. The analysis of the research illustrates the individualised complexity of the constructs both within and between the participant groups. The differential in the construction of the difficulty, being within child, within family and within the wider system, is prominent and reflects the dominant medical and legal discourses in terms of the parents and staff.

The need for early identification of predisposing, precipitatory and perpetuating factors should be the priority of a multi-systemic approach to support pupils at risk of attendance difficulties and those experiencing ESNA, with the inherent flexibility and capacity to meet the heterogeneous presentation of this population. This necessitates the utilisation of the breadth of skills of a range of professionals, including educational psychologists whose primary role is to facilitate inclusion of all pupils including those experiencing extended school non-attendance.

The diversity in the constructions between the participant groups, is illustrative of how dominant discourses of those in power operate to misrepresent those experiencing a phenomena and the consequential impact on timely and suitable support and intervention.

The pupil construction of the causes of ESNA is more complex and multi-systemic than that aligned with the 'anxious non-attender'. The need to seek, hear and take heed of

the voice of the child therefore is imperative in any strategic approach to supporting and reintegrating the extended school non-attender.

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Appendices

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Appendix 1: Pupil Absence Characteristics (DFE, 2018)

Pupil Characteristic	Pattern of Absence Rates 2016/2017	Pattern of Persistent Absence Rates 2016/2017
Gender	Similar across genders	Similar across genders
Free School Meals Eligibility	7.3% compared to 4.2% for pupils who are not eligible.	More than twice the rate compared with pupils who are not eligible.
Statement of Special Educational Needs or Education Health Care Plan	Almost double that of pupils without a statement of SEN or an EHC.	More than twice as high as those without a statement of SEN or an EHC.
National Curriculum Year Group	Pupils in years 3 and 4 had the lowest and pupils in year 10 and 11 the highest overall absence rates.	Pupils in years 3 and 4 had the lowest and pupils in year 10 and 11 the highest overall persistent absence rates.
Ethnic Group	Highest for traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/ Roma pupils at 18.1 % and 12.9 % respectively. Substantially lower rates for pupils of Chinese and Black African ethnicity at 2.4 % and 2.9 % respectively.	Persistent absence rates reflect a similar trend to the pattern of absence.

Appendix 2: Information and consent for Parent (Pilot)



(Insert Educational Psychology Service logo)

Research Pilot Study

My name is Kate Clissold and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist from the University of Birmingham, currently working with (insert Educational Psychology Service name). I am conducting a piece of research about why some pupils stop attending school for extended periods of time (extended non-attendance) and would like you and your child to be involved.

Before I start the study, I need to pilot the methods of data collection. These are a timeline of school experience and a grid where words or pictures are recorded. The pilot will ask pupils to think about their transfer from primary to secondary school.

I would like to invite (insert name) to be involved in the pilot study. If you are happy for (insert name) to be involved, please sign the consent form and return it to (school contact) or directly to me in the stamped addressed envelope.

Parental consent on behalf of child:		
I have read and understood the information about the pilot study.	Yes	No
I agree for my child to take part in the project. This includes my child talking to Kate Clissold, trainee educational psychologist.	Yes	No
I agree that my child's voice will be recorded throughout the interview.	Yes	No
I agree that the results of the study will be written in a report for the researcher's university thesis and may later be published in an academic journal. I understand that neither my child's name nor the name of their school will be included in these reports.	Yes	No

Who should I contact if there is a problem?

No risks should arise for your child as the teacher, or for any of the children as a result of participating in this research. However, if a problem were to arise, then the researcher, (Kate Clissold) or the researcher supervisor (Julia Howe) can be contacted between 9-5pm Monday-Friday. Contact details are at the end of this information leaflet.

Who has reviewed the study?

This research project has been approved by the Humanities and Social Science Ethical Review Committee at the University of Birmingham.

Contact details for further information:



Thank you for completing this consent form.

Appendix 3: Information for Pupil (Pilot)

Hello (insert name)

My name is Kate. I am doing a project for my university course. To make sure that this goes well, I need to do what is called a pilot study where I try out the ways I'm planning to collect information to check that they are OK.

What's it about?

The main project is about why young people stop going to school. The information that we find out will help people who work with schools to understand the best ways to help pupils like you who find it hard to go to school.

What would you do?

We would talk about your move from primary school to secondary school. We could use words or drawings - whichever you like - to help us think about this. I would record our conversation so I could listen to it later and think more about what you have said. The recording is kept safe so other people can't listen to it.

What will happen to the information - will people know what you've said?

Your name will not be recorded so anyone who looks at the research won't know that you were involved in the research.

What happens now?

XXXX (insert name of educational psychologist making the approach) will ask you if you would like to know more about the project. If you do, then I will contact your Mum or Dad to arrange a time to come and see you.

Thank you for reading this.

Kate

(Insert picture)

Appendix 4: Consent Form for Pupil (Pilot)

For each of the statements below, I am going to ask you if you understand the sentence and if you agree to it. If you agree to all the sentences, please write your name at the bottom.

Statement	Understand	Agree
I am happy to be part of the pilot study for Kate's project.		
I am happy for Kate to record what I am saying so she can listen to it later.		
I don't have to help Kate with her project and I can stop the conversation at any time.		
If I say or write something that Kate is worried about, she would need to ask for help.		

I understand everything Kate said and I agree to it.

Name:

Date:

Appendix 5: All about Me Pro forma

ALL ABOUT ME!

My NAME _____

My FAMILY: _____

My AGE: _____

My BIRTHDAY: _____

My FAVORITE THINGS
To Do: _____

THIS IS ME

My FAVORITE COLOR: _____

My FAVORITE FOOD: _____

My FAVORITE GAME/SPORT: _____

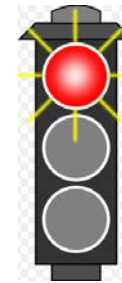
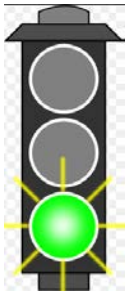
My FAVORITE THING ABOUT SCHOOL: _____

I AM SPECIAL BECAUSE... _____

WHEN I GROW UP I WANT TO BE A: _____

Appendix 6: Timeline of School

(Insert name) school timeline



When I
started
school

Sister
started
school

Played for
the football
team

Started
secondary
school

Started
GCSEs

Traffic light
moved to
show when
non-
attendance
started

Today

Appendix 7: Pro forma for Grid Elaboration Method

Appendix 8: Discourse Analysis (Phase 1):

Extract of Transcription

Interviewee: At the xxxx one, I was the only one from xxx there and I had broken my foot playing before when I was, just after I joined like the development programme and I had missed all the trials to get into the main academy but they had given me a place in that anyway and there was about 30 boys in there and in the summer holidays there was. Well before that I was getting Physiotherapy for my foot because I was just getting back from that and then having to join back training sessions I found that quite hard because none of them knew who I was and I didn't know any of them. And then in the Summer there was two times a week, 6 hour days at the Xxxx Stadium and that was hard because I was just on my own a bit, singled out. Not on purposefully but they were all groups are players from other teams and I was the only one from XXXX so it was quite hard. And then the XXXX I knew people but I think by that point I had anxiety and things had got worse because I had not really opened up much about it all. And I had and it had been shut down a bit so I couldn't get it sorted then so then it just got worse so I couldn't really cope with that either.

Interviewer: Yeah. I think you did really well actually to go and give the XXXX a go after you had, how you had felt in xxxxx, you did go and give it another go so that is really positive. And also, when you feel something is not working as well, to be able to say, actually this isn't right for me shows real strength. Maybe, I don't know, saying that as a strength rather than a failing. So, I think well done you. If you weren't happy doing it, that you were able to say actually I don't want to do this. Okay. So those were some things out, that were going on outside of school that then it was hard to talk about them in school and you didn't feel great. Yeah. You mentioned anxiety a few times. When did you start to feel anxious do you think?

Interviewee: I think I always have.

Interviewer: You always have? Yeah.

Interviewee: Because when I was in Primary School, I always complained about getting tummy aches and told Mum I couldn't or didn't want to go in but she just thought I was putting it on so I didn't have to go in but like now it has come apparent that I did have tummy aches and it was because of being nervous about it.

Interviewer: Yeah being nervous about going to school yeah. You managed it at school, at Primary School. Why was that different do you think from Secondary?

Interviewee: I think because of my age, Mum could always just dragged me in and I couldn't really put up much of a fight but now I think if I just say I am staying in bed, I am not going she can't really pick me up so.

Interviewer: Yeah okay. So, it is more like you had to go so you did. But there was still those feelings of anxiety.

Interviewee: I still think I felt I could go in but in, after the October half term on the Monday back at school, like I just woke up and I felt like it was impossible to get out of bed and showered and dressed to get into school.

Interviewee 2: You did go on the Monday, though didn't you?

Interviewee: I thought it was the Monday that I didn't and then the Tuesday

Interviewee 2: I think you went on the Monday and then you were off on the Tuesday because you hadn't been. It had been difficult

Interviewee: No that was on the Monday.

Interviewer: Okay. So that is the main reason that you are not attending now is because you feel too anxious to go. Okay. Does anything make your anxiety worse around school?

Interviewee: I would say, I can't really remember now because it was a long time ago.

Interviewer: Yeah, a long time ago yeah.

Interviewee: It was.

Interviewer: What would make it better do you think? What would make school better?

Interviewee: I think there was like a couple of certain individuals that like I didn't really get on with and I could cope with it like before the half term but then after the events that happened in half term there was like family problems at home and then I didn't enjoy school because of those two people and then I just couldn't really cope with it. So, I chose to, well I didn't choose to I just physically couldn't get into school on some days.

Interviewer: So, although you are feeling anxious, these are the things like the people around you at the school and things happening at home can also be, seem to be a reason that make the anxiety much worse and you can't go in? Okay. Were you able to talk to anybody about the people you didn't get on with at the school?

Interviewee: Not really. I tried but it didn't get taken that seriously.

Interviewer: Was there any help at school you know if you are feeling anxious? You know, did you have anybody you could go to or any?

Interviewee: Well they tried to but it wasn't very good help because it took until Christmas to see the school and then they didn't really. They gave me like a work, someone to talk to if I was feeling like down or something, like a card to get out of lessons if I needed to go to the toilet and a pass if I was late but I am not really going to use a card that says "xxxx can go to the toilet if he wants to" in the middle of the lesson and then have all the questions from everyone in the class like why have you got

a card that says you can go to the toilet? And stuff like that it wasn't very. It just wasn't done in a very easy way.

Interviewer: It sounds like if it brings lots of attention to you actually that is not helpful. Yeah. So, with the, do you think it is similar that how you felt with not going to the xxxx and not going to school that you felt the anxiety is similar?

Interviewee: Mmm

Interviewer: Yeah? Okay. And are you getting any support from any other agencies or services like CAMHS or?

Interviewee: No

Interviewer: No?

Interviewee: I have got my, this is like over a year and a bit ago now and they only have my initial assessment thing a month or two ago and that was over a year of waiting and then haven't got the first like CBT therapy thing but that is not until March so it has been like 18 months of waiting for that. And then in between my Mum has had to get Psychologist and then that didn't work out because I needed medication so then we had to try and get a Psychiatrist but then that took 3 months and then I think we didn't have the initial, we did have the group therapy from CAMHS but that just set me back further. And then

Interviewer: You didn't find that helpful?

Interviewee: No but I was on the waiting list for that for about 7 months and then they said I could have one for one to one but that would be another 9 months and then but

Interviewer: It is a long time, isn't it? It is a long time to be out of school. So, is that sort of lack of help contributed to you not going to school?

Interviewee: Yeah

Interviewer: What would you have liked from school to help you?

Interviewee: Maybe just I think, back then I didn't want it but I wasn't offered it but it would be counselling and like just a bit of therapy. Because back then it would have worked I think because I wasn't depressed or severely anxious but like that is what happened from not going into school.

Interviewer: So yes, you felt anxious, then you were coping, other things happened which made you feel more anxious but as the help wasn't there with that time, things have carried on for a long time then.

Interviewee: Yeah and I think part of the problem was for the two months between October and December, like normally I would just talk to my Mum and Dad if I had anything but because the

problem was that me and my Dad like fell out over the xxxx thing and like he didn't, we didn't talk to each other for like 2 months and then that was in itself hard and like I felt like I couldn't really talk to my Mum or Dad because I talk to you at the start and you were just getting, it was like I talk to Mum, Mum talks to Dad and it is like just you in the middle and I felt bad so I just didn't really say much to either of you or to you because I wasn't talking to Dad anyway.

Interviewer: That was a rather difficult time for you all. Okay. So, you have got an appointment now for some CBT yeah? And have they given you some medication?

Interviewee: Yeah, I have got, I started with a Psychiatrist in September and she has given me medication every day and she is starting to do now because my overall mood has gotten better.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Interviewee: She has started to do like CBT and

Interviewer: So, she is doing CBT work with you? Yeah? Okay. Are you finding that helpful?

Interviewee: I think yeah because it just help me at sometimes and I have felt myself doing it and recognising when I am getting anxious and doing things to prevent the like stages getting worse.

Interviewer: And she did she do the thing you know where, part of CBT is doing little trials and you go out with your CBT therapist and things?

Interviewee: Doing things like going to the cinemas are hard thing for me and we have been there a few times now.

Interviewer: Okay. What have you been to see?

Interviewee: The first time we went there was nothing on. Paddington 2

Interviewer: Well I think that is a good choice. I enjoyed that.

Interviewee 2: Yeah brilliant actually

Interviewee: And then I can't remember the next one but recently went at the weekend to see that one about Winston Churchill.

Interviewer: Oh, yes, I saw that the Darkest Hour. What did you think?

Interviewee: I didn't really like it that much.

Interviewer: It was dark, wasn't it?

Interviewee: But that was quite a hard one because it was on a Sunday and it was very busy compared to, we had been going at like 1pm on a weekday so it was very quiet and then that was very busy. I did find that quite hard but like another thing I found that I have done recently was that I

used CBT was I went for a meal with my girlfriend's family and that was really hard and on the way was, it just brought flashbacks back because I was in the same car, with my dad, he took me to the Xxxx training in and he was taking me to that and it was an event that I was anxious for and it just brought things back for me and I was almost close to saying "take me home" but I managed to get a grip of that and do just some breathing and then I was fine.

Interviewer: Yeah. Well done.

Interviewee: That is the biggest thing that I can see it is working and that showed me that it is working.

Interviewer: Yeah so you are noticing when those feelings start and getting those thoughts in. You are thinking like this is happening, I am going to challenge this.

Interviewee: uh huh

Interviewer: Yeah. It sounds like you are making really good use of it. Yeah. Something else just came to mind. Oh yes, you said about the Cinema being busy and I was just wondering if you ever found, the school is busy, isn't it? A lot of people, how was that for you?

Interviewee: I didn't like the, like the going between lessons and stuff. I think because of my height as well. Every time like all the time, there was just people saying

Interviewer: I know what is about people commenting, obviously, I am tall, I have never gone up to anybody and said oh aren't you short? But people feel they can comment on your height all the time, don't they?

Interviewee: Yeah the other day like everyone seemed to know who I was and I think it was because of my height and I had no idea, this was a week ago, I was like on my first walk out of the house in ages which I find quite hard to do and then, it probably a Year 8 or 9 person was just like "It's Xxxx" and I have never seen them in my life and that's kind of put me off going out for walks again, it's something silly but like being recognised is a big thing I don't like having done.

Interviewer: That sounds similar to you, you were talking about the being at school and people knowing that you hadn't gone, kept going to the xxxx or using their card to go out of the classroom, it's like being noticed, isn't it? It sounds quite difficult for you. Is there anything else you would like to say about how you find it hard to go to school?

Interviewee: I think like now, I am like not going back to for GCSE's because that has been sorted out and I don't have to go back there of course I am allowed but I don't think that is going to happen. But I say the thing with individual people doesn't help because there was another, before Christmas I was contemplating starting to go back in and like into a separate room and do some work and there was something happened and over around Christmas time with the same people who I found it hard to get into school with because of them something happened with them and a few more people basically got to me quite a lot and has made me not want to go to school at all anymore.

Interviewee 2: That was via social media

Interviewee: They were all drunk at a party and just sending like horrible videos for no reason.

Interviewer: That is awful. So, these things contribute to. sort of anxiety is the overall issues of the things that are contributing towards that and make it more difficult to get on top of it.

Interviewee: I think sometimes I do feel, because I know my Mum talks about it, I think she feels a bit I don't know if let down is the right word but about the lack of help from like places and I think that makes me feel bad because they are having to pay quite a lot of money for these Psychiatrist session so I don't really want to go very regularly to them because like it is a lot of money and I just I think feeling getting better makes me feel bad having appointments and especially private appointments makes me feel bad because I don't want them to have to spend money because there is help available for free but then we are not getting it so that is kind of like the last resort having to pay for it.

Interviewer: yeah it is very difficult situation, isn't it? because there is the help and the system isn't working very well at the moment and as parents you want the best for your children so that is what we do and it is great that you are starting to feel better and that supports there to help you continue to feel better as well. But that worries you, does it? That your appointments and the cost and?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Is there anything else you would like to say? Or are you happy to leave it there? Thank you so much Xxxx. I think you have talked really clearly about the reasons why you find it hard to go to school and it sounds like it is quite a lot that underpins the anxiety as well.

Interviewee: There is one last thing. I think a lack of understanding.

Interviewer: Lack of understanding of?

Interviewee: Of like mental health issues like in the school and like from teachers and I see, I think it is almost seen as a weakness that people pick on rather than something that they want to help people with and people I know have mental health issues in my year group, get endlessly bullied and people say horrible things like, I don't like saying them almost but like because it will affect them and hurt them, I don't want anyone to know about mine which is almost a hard thing to. I think I missed quite a lot out.

Interviewer: That's okay, you can keep talking.

Interviewee: Like it is hard to get back in because I know I will face a lot of questions about why I have been away but I don't want to say it is a mental health issue because I feel like I will get picked on as a weakness and as I know I will because I have seen people with mental health issues get picked on and bullied because of their mental health issues.

Appendix 9: Discourse Analysis (Phase 4): Extract of Broad Codes and Illustrative Quotations

Bullying	Experience of school	Issues out of school	Anxiety	Physical symptoms of anxiety	Change from primary school	Support at school	Delay in support	Understanding/perception of others of non-attendance
<p>I got bullied quite badly from like year 1</p> <p>I could cope with it like before the half term but then after the events that happened in half term there was like family problems at home and then I didn't enjoy school because of those two people and then I just couldn't really cope with it.</p> <p>Before Christmas I was contemplating starting to go back in and like into a separate room and do some work and there was something happened and over around Christmas time with the same people who I found it hard to get into school with because of them something happened with them and a few more people basically got to me quite a lot and has made me not want to go to school at all anymore... They were all drunk at a party and just sending like horrible videos for no reason.</p>	<p>I didn't really enjoy school</p>	<p>But then there was an out of school event with my Dad ... we had a fall out about that and then that made the schools thing harder to cope with almost.</p> <p>Letting other people down, difficult to tell them why I'd left the xxxxxx</p> <p>Related to xxxxxx – 'I was just on my own, singled out</p> <p>I think by that point I had anxiety and things had got worse because I had not really opened up much about it all. And I had and it had been shut down a bit so I couldn't get it sorted then so then it just got worse so I couldn't really cope with that either</p> <p>I could cope with it like before the half term but then after the events that happened in half term there was like family problems at home and then I didn't enjoy school because of those two people and then I just couldn't really cope with it.</p> <p>I felt bad so I just didn't really say</p>	<p>Anxiety - named</p> <p>Link with out of school event and not being able to continue xxxxxx training.</p> <p>I think I always have [felt anxious]</p> <p>I think because of my age, Mum could always just dragged me in and I couldn't really put up much of a fight but now I think if I just say I am staying in bed, I am not going she can't really pick me up so.</p> <p>I didn't like the, like the going between lessons and stuff – related to height and being noticed.</p>	<p>Because when I was in Primary School, I always complained about getting tummy aches and told Mum I couldn't or didn't want to go in but she just thought I was putting it on so I didn't have to go in but like now it has come apparent that I did have tummy aches and it was because of being nervous about it.</p>	<p>I think because of my age, Mum could always just dragged me in and I couldn't really put up much of a fight but now I think if I just say I am staying in bed, I am not going she can't really pick me up so.</p> <p>I didn't like the, like the going between lessons and stuff – related to height and being noticed.</p>	<p>I tried [to talk to people at school] but it didn't get taken seriously.</p> <p>Well they tried to but it wasn't very good help because it took until Christmas to see the school and then they didn't really. They gave me like a work, I was feeling like down or something, like a card to get out of lessons if I needed to go to the toilet and a pass if I was late but I am not really going to use a card that says "xxx can go to the toilet if he wants to" in the middle of the lesson and then have all the questions from everyone in the class like why have you got a card that says you can go to the toilet? god stuff like that it wasn't very, it just wasn't done in a very easy way.</p> <p>It was just everyone [00:33:33] running through, stools and chairs and like I was like in, I didn't really talk to anyone for 3 hours when I was in for that long. I didn't have anything given to</p>	<p>I have got my, this is like over a year and a bit ago now and they only have my initial assessment thing a month or two ago and that was over a year of waiting and then haven't got the first like CBT therapy thing but that is not until March so it has been like 18 months of waiting for that.</p> <p>And then in between my Mum has had to get Psychologist and then that didn't work out because I needed medication so then we had to try and get a psychiatrist but then that took 3 months and then I think we didn't have the initial, we did have the group therapy from CAMS but that just set me back further.</p> <p>I think in all the time I am waiting it was just back in October I had a bit of help, I probably could just have CAT then and it wouldn't have happened to.</p> <p>Maybe just I think, back then I didn't want it but I wasn't offered it but it would be counselling and like just a bit of therapy.</p>	<p>Head of year and she asked what I find difficult but nothing was really done about it.</p> <p>Like it is hard to get back in because I know I will face a lot of questions about why I have been away but I don't want to say it is a mental health issue because I feel like I will get picked on as a weakness and as I know I will because I have seen people with mental health issues get picked on and bullied because of their mental health issues.</p> <p>But that is what I would say is the only way to face all the questions if I went back into school and that is a massive factor of not wanting to go back in as well. Just the amount of questions I will get.</p> <p>And the only way I know I can answer them is by saying it is mental health issues but I can't bring myself to say it</p> <p>I think a lack of understanding... of like mental health issues like in the school and like from teachers and I see, I think it is almost seen as a weakness that people pick on rather than something that they want to help people with and people I know have mental health issues in my year group, get endlessly bullied and people say horrible things like, I don't like saying them almost but like because it will affect them and hurt them,</p> <p>I don't want anyone to know about mine [mental illness] which is almost a hard thing to.</p> <p>I hated my Mum telling people what it was because I just feel it is an embarrassing thing to have</p> <p>And some of the teachers... I think there is just quite a lot of adults because my Dad, I</p>

Appendix 10: Pupil Information Sheet

Hello *****

My name is Kate. I am doing a project for my university course and I'd like you to be part of it.

What's it about?

The project is about why young people stop going to school. The information that we find out will help people who work with schools to understand the best ways to help pupils like you who find it hard to go to school.

What would you do?

I would come and visit you at home so we could talk more about the project. If you decide that you would like to be involved, we can talk about your experience of school and why you find it difficult to go.

We could use words or drawings - whichever you like - to help us think about this. I would record our conversation so I could listen to it later and think more about what you have said. The recording is kept safe so other people can't listen to it.

I would also talk to you Mum or Dad and someone from the school you went to, to find out why they think you find it hard to go to school.

What will happen to the information - will people know what you've said?

I will be talking to some other young people too. I will collect all of the information to look at the reasons why pupils find it hard to go to school. Your name will not be recorded so when anybody looks at what I've found out they won't know that you were involved in the research. The only time I would need to share information about you is if you say or write something that I'm worried about and then I would need to ask for help.

What happens now?

If you would like to know more about the project, I will arrange a time to come and see you.

Thank you for reading this.

Kate

(Photograph)

Appendix 11: Parent Information Sheet



EPS Logo

My name is Kate Clissold and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist from the University of Birmingham, currently working with XXXX Educational Psychology Service. I am conducting a piece of research about why some pupils stop attending school for extended periods of time (extended non-attendance) and would like you and your child to be involved.

The research will focus on how the reasons of extended non-attendance amongst secondary school pupils are viewed by the young person, their parent and the person who is most involved from the school at which they are on roll.

Before you decide whether you would like to take part, please read this leaflet that gives information about why the research is being carried out and what will be involved if you and your child participate. If you are interested in taking part, I will arrange to come to see you both to talk more about the project and answer any questions that you may have.

What is the purpose of the study?

Research into the reasons for extended non-attendance is important because of the short and long term effects of this on young people. This research is being carried out to increase the understanding of reasons for extended non-attendance and inform discussion in XXX Educational Psychology Service and the local authority about preventative work for pupils who may potentially become extended non-attenders and about the future provision for these young people.

Why have we been selected?

Your child is included in the group of pupils that the study will focus on. The pupils involved in the research will be girls and boys aged 11-16 who are experiencing extended non-attendance and have done so for at least 10 weeks. They will also have had involvement from the Educational Psychology Service and/or the Hospital Education Service.

Do we have to take part?

No. You and your child will only participate in the study if you both want to.

What will happen if I give permission for us to take part?

If you are interested in being involved in the research I will arrange to come and see you both to talk about the project and answer any questions that you may have. If you choose to participate in this research, you will be asked to sign a consent form on behalf of your child and yourself. Once you have given your consent and your child has agreed to be participate, we will arrange another time to meet so I can interview you individually.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The benefits of being involved are in the contribution of your views to help develop an accurate understanding of extended non-attendance. This is essential to support pupils who are at risk of becoming extended non-attenders and provide the most appropriate provision for pupils who are experiencing prolonged absence from school. It is hoped that this will benefit pupils currently experiencing extended non-attendance and those who find themselves absent from school for an extended period in the future.

What are the possible risks of taking part?

There are minimal risks to yourself and your child. Should you have any concerns during the course of the research you will be able to contact the researcher using the details provided.

If we change our minds, can we withdraw from the study?

Yes. If at any point during the study you or your child wish to withdraw, you can inform the researcher via email. Any information already collected would be destroyed. You do not have to give a reason for withdrawing. If after the interview you want to withdraw your child's responses or your own, you have two weeks from the interview date to inform the researcher of this via e-mail.

Will the information be kept confidential in this study?

Yes. The researcher complies with the Data Protection Act (1998) in terms of handling, processing and destroying all participants' data. All data collected will be kept strictly confidential and will be stored anonymously so that no participant can be personally identified. The data will be destroyed 10 years after the research is completed, having been stored securely over the interim.

Any paper copies of data will be stored securely at XXXX Educational Psychology service. Any digital copies of data (such as audio recordings of interviews) will be stored securely on an encrypted memory stick.

If however you or your child shares information during the research that puts yourselves or others at risk of harm, I would be required to break confidentiality and seek advice.

What will happen with the results of the research study?

An information sheet with a summary of the key findings will be shared with you and the other participants.

In addition, the results of the study will be written up as part of the researcher's thesis for the Doctorate in Applied Educational and Child Psychology. The study may also be written up as a journal article and submitted for publication to a relevant professional journal. The work may be presented at conferences. Your name, your child's name and all other research participants' details will remain anonymous at all times.

Who is organising the research?

The research is organised by the University of Birmingham and XXXX Educational Psychology Service.

Who should I contact if there is a problem?

If a problem were to arise, then the researcher, (Kate Clissold) or the researcher's supervisor (Julia Howe) can be contacted between 9-5pm Monday-Friday. Contact details are at the end of this information leaflet.

Who has reviewed the study?

This research project has been approved by the Humanities and Social Science Ethical Review Committee at the University of Birmingham.

What do I do next?

If you and your child are willing to participate in this study please ***** know or contact Kate Clissold (the researcher) directly.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information leaflet and for considering your participation in the study.

Contact details for further information:



Appendix 12: Staff Information Sheet



EPS Logo

Information for Staff

I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist currently working with xxxx Educational Psychology Service. As part of the training in Applied Educational and Child Psychology at the University of Birmingham, I will be undertaking research that will explore how the reasons for extended school non-attendance amongst secondary school pupils are perceived by the young person, their parent and the professional whom is most involved in their care at the school at which they are on roll.

Extended school non-attendance is a problem that incurs short and long term risks for the pupil, both in terms of academic attainment and life outcomes. The aims of the research are:

i)	to increase the knowledge base of the causes of extended school non-attendance;
ii)	to inform the most appropriate provision for this group of pupils within xxxx city; and
iii)	to inform preventative work for pupils who may potentially become extended school non-attenders.

As part of the research, I am planning to complete interviews with school staff and would like to obtain your views. The interview will involve a small time commitment of approximately 60 minutes and the information gathered will be included in the write-up of the research; your participation will be anonymised. If any of the information shared during the course of the research puts you or others at risk of harm however, I would be required to break confidentiality and to seek advice.

If you are willing to be involved or would like to find out more information before agreeing to participate, please contact me directly via email (kate.clissold@xxxx.gov.uk) or at xxxx EPS on xxxx

You may also contact my supervisor Dr Julia Howe at The University of Birmingham if you have any further queries ().

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

Kate Clissold

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Appendix 13: Parent Consent Form



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Consent Form

Parent's name: _____

Child's name: _____

Parental consent on behalf of child:		
I have read and understood the project information sheet.	Yes	No
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	Yes	No
I agree for my child to take part in the project. This includes my child talking to Kate Clissold, trainee educational.	Yes	No
I agree that my child's voice will be recorded throughout the interview.	Yes	No
I understand that my child's participation is voluntary. I understand that I can withdraw my child from the study at any time. If, after the study, I want to withdraw my child's data, I have two weeks from the date of the interview to inform the researcher. I know that I do not have to give any reasons for withdrawing data.	Yes	No
I agree that the results of the study will be written in a report for the researcher's university thesis and may later be published in an academic journal. I understand that neither my child's name nor the name of their school will be included in these reports.	Yes	No
I agree for the data provide by my child to be stored securely by the researcher for ten years.	Yes	No

Parental consent for involvement		
I agree to taking part in an interview with Kate Clissold.	Yes	No
I agree that my voice will be recorded throughout the interview.	Yes	No

I understand that my participation is voluntary. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time. If, after the study, I want to withdraw my data I have two weeks from the date of the interview to inform the researcher. I know that I do not have to give any reasons for withdrawing data.	Yes	No
I agree that the results of the study will be written in a report for the researcher's university thesis and may later be published in an academic journal. I understand that my name will not be included in these reports.	Yes	No
I agree for the data I provide to be stored securely by the researcher for ten years.	Yes	No

Parent's signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete the consent form. Please get in touch with me if you have any questions or queries.

Yours Sincerely

Kate Clissold

Appendix 14: Staff Consent Form



EPS logo

Consent Form

Name: _____

I agree to taking part in an interview with Kate Clissold.	Yes	No
I agree that my voice will be recorded throughout the interview.	Yes	No
I understand that my participation is voluntary. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time. If, after the study, I want to withdraw my data I have two weeks from the date of the interview to inform the researcher. I know that I do not have to give any reasons for withdrawing data.	Yes	No
I agree that the results of the study will be written in a report for the researcher's university thesis and may later be published in an academic journal. I understand that my name will not be included in these reports.	Yes	No
I agree for the data I provide to be stored securely by the researcher for ten years.	Yes	No

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete the consent form. Please get in touch with me if you have any questions or queries.

Yours Sincerely

Kate Clissold

Appendix 15: Pupil assent Form

Hi (child's name),

For each of the statements below, I am going to ask you if you understand the sentence and if you agree to it. If you agree to all the sentences, please write your name at the bottom.

Statement	Understand	Agree
I am happy to be part of the project about why pupils stop going to school.		
I am happy for Kate visit me at home.		
I am happy for Kate to record what I am saying so she can listen to it later.		
I don't have to help Kate with her project and I can stop the conversation at any time.		
After I have spoken to Kate, if I decide that I don't want to be part of the research I will need to let Kate know by (insert date).		
If I say or write something that Kate is worried about, she would need to ask for help.		

I understand everything Kate said and I agree to it.

Name:

Date: